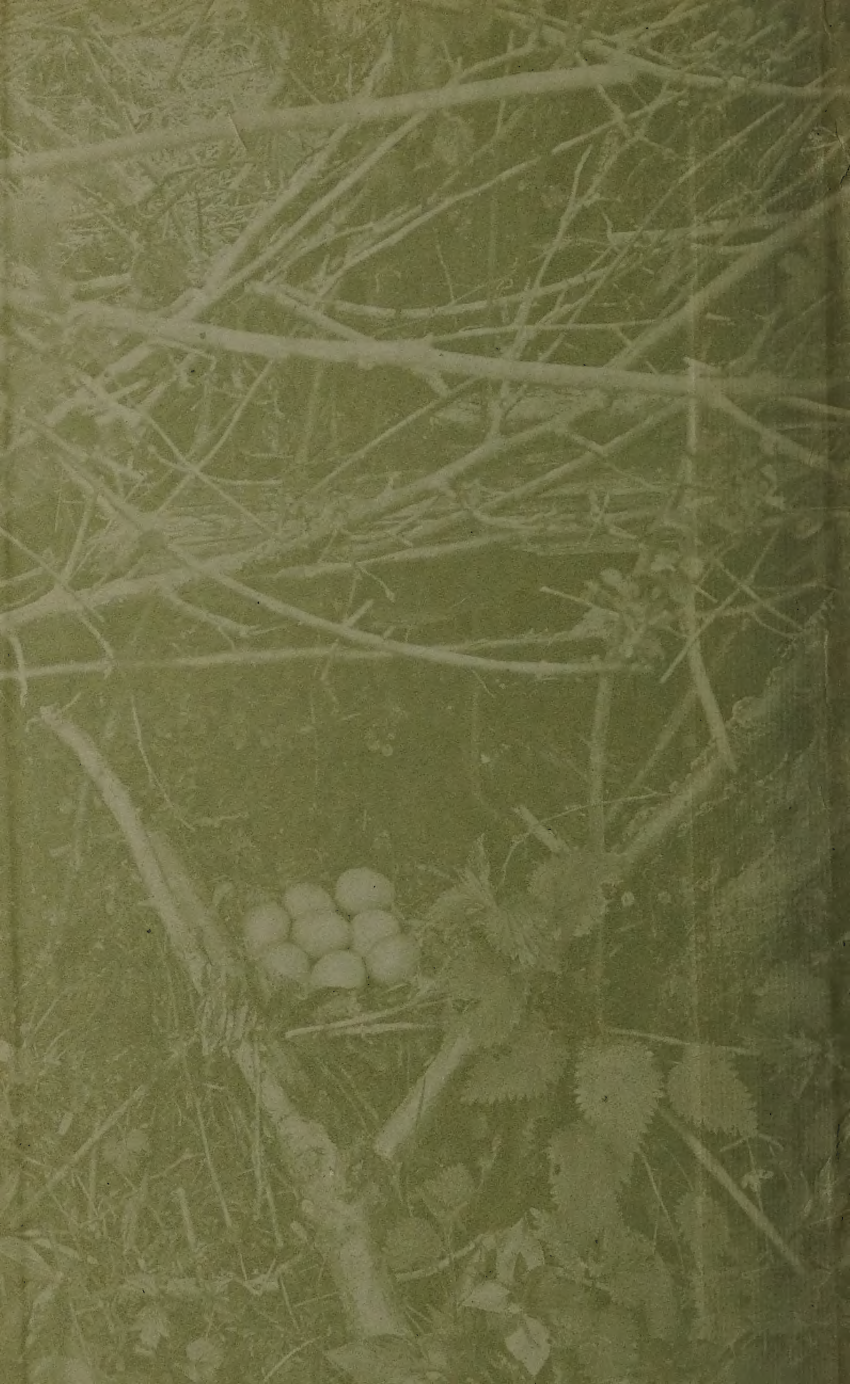
ADVENTURES IN BIRD-LAND

OLIVER G. PIKE



$1.25

Herbert Claude Apperly.

With love from.

Lomy July 10. 1908

ADVENTURES IN BIRD-LAND

Kite Preparing to Fly

ADVENTURES

IN

BIRD-LAND

BY

OLIVER G PIKE, F.R.P.S.

Author of 'Home Life in Bird-land,' 'Woodland, Field, and Shore,' 'In Bird-land with Field-glass and Camera,' 'Hillside, Rock, and Dale,' 'Bird-land Pictures,' &c., &c.

CONTAINING FOUR PHOTOGRAVURES, AND NINETY PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN DIRECT FROM NATURE BY THE AUTHOR. TOGETHER WITH A COLOURED PLATE, AND ONE HUNDRED PEN SKETCHES FROM NATURE BY

E. RICHMOND PATON

LONDON

THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY

4 BOUVERIE STREET; & 65 ST. PAUL'S CHURCHYARD, E.C.

1907

To

My dear Father and Mother

I lovingly dedicate

this Book

ROCK. DOVE'S NEST.

FOREWORDS

IN *Adventures in Bird-land* I have not confined myself to the adventures of the photographer in his travels after the birds, for Bird-land itself is always full of exciting adventures amongst the birds themselves, and I have included many of these. For opportunities for photographing rare birds I am indebted to many friends, and it is impossible to thank all of them; but I must publicly acknowledge the help and assistance given by the following gentlemen, who have either allowed me the run of their fine estates or let me know of opportunities for photographing birds: Mr. A. B. Paton, for a most enjoyable holiday spent on the latter's estate in Scotland; the Rev. D. Edmondes Owen, for a never-to-be-forgotten

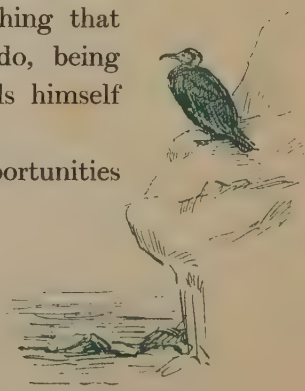
four weeks spent at the charming rectory of Llanelwedd; Mr. W. J. Percy Player, who, in company with the Rector of Llanelwedd, and that other good Welsh naturalist, Mr. A. Gwynne-Vaughan, took us for many a delightful motor ride through the best bird-haunts in the Principality; Mr. E. D. Thomas, J.P.; Colonel Evan Thomas; Mr. T. A. Cotton, J.P.; Captain J. V. Taylor, J.P.; Mr. Ernest Smith; Mr. W. K. Robertson; Mr. William Morton; and last, but not least, to Mr. J. R. Paton; and his son, E. Richmond Paton, whose very excellent sketches help to illustrate the following pages. As the work of a youth not yet out of his teens, they reflect very great credit upon him, and give promise of future distinction. My friend is a keen and thorough naturalist, and we have had many interesting Bird-land rambles together, by day and night, on the moors and shores of Bonnie Scotland, where, with pen, note-book, sketch-book, and camera, many of the following pictures, anecdotes, and photographs were collected.

I am a protector of birds and not a collector of eggs. In these days when so many people have a mania for collecting, it is a wonder

that the rare birds survive as they do. The tricks that some of these men practise to secure their eggs are despicable in the extreme.

Last summer, on visiting the Orkney Islands, I found that a certain collector had been there two years previously and had actually travelled under my name. This collector knew well that I was staying in the heart of Wales for several weeks. He was well received by certain people, and then, when he had used my name as a protector of birds, to find out the haunts of the rarest species, he decamped with a big haul of clutches. I have no actual proof as to who this person was, but he was described to me as a tall man, with fair, curly hair, who usually wore military puttees. It is needless to say that such underhand action is calculated to cause me serious embarrassment in my work. I mention this to warn gentlemen that they should be careful in giving away the haunts of rare birds to strangers. The conduct I have described is certainly the meanest thing that I have ever known a collector to do, being altogether unworthy of one who calls himself an ornithologist.

I shall always be grateful for opportunities



of photographing rare birds or their nests, and I should like to add that when the haunt of a rare bird is entrusted to me it remains a tight secret for ever.

O. G. P.

WINCHMORE HILL,
MIDDLESEX.

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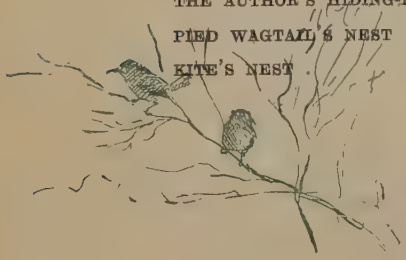

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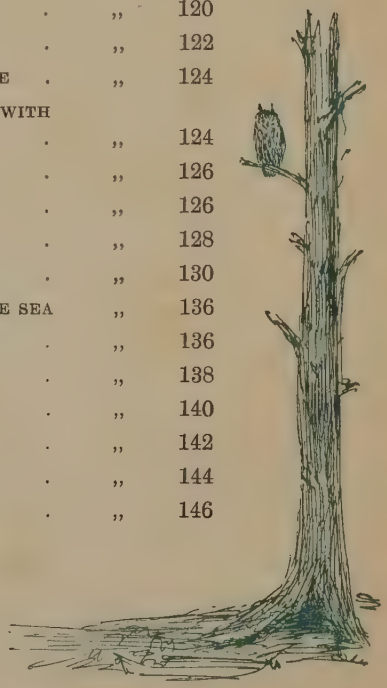

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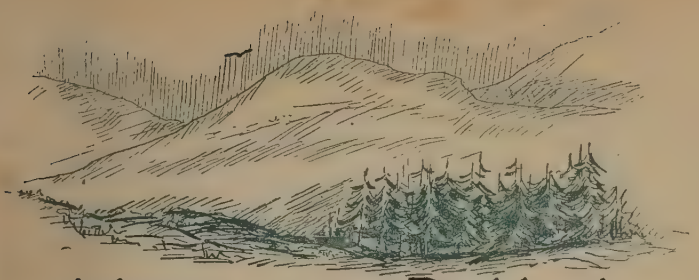
KESTREL AT REST ON THE SUMMIT OF A CLIFF.

(From a water-colour painting by E. Richmond Paton.)



Adventures in Bird-land

CHAPTER I

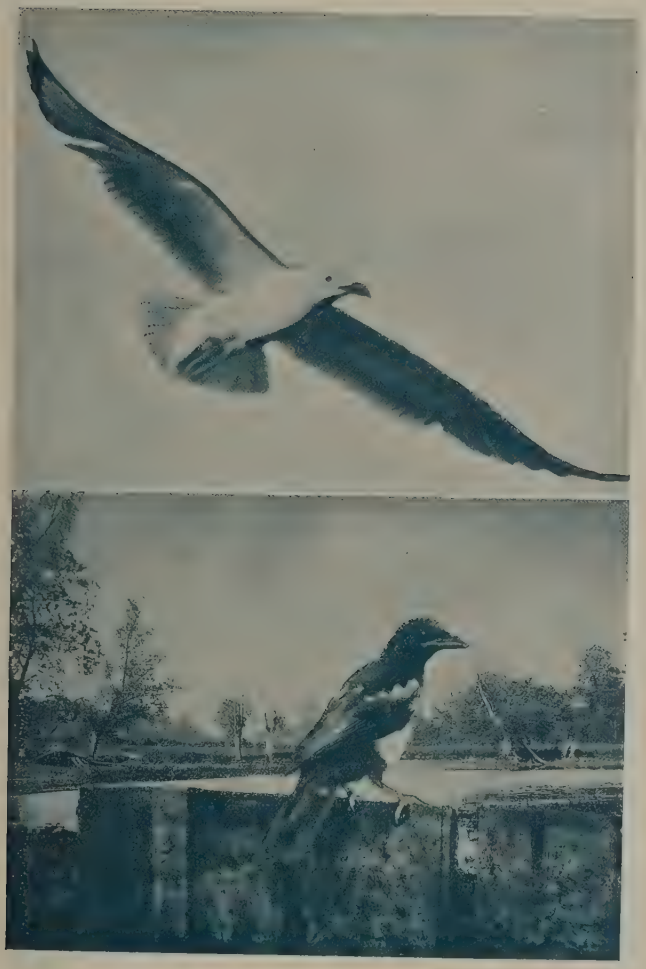
A Summer Evening

WE were sitting on a moss-covered bank on the margin of a wood. The sun had already sunk beyond the trees behind us, and we had watched the shadows grow longer and then slowly disappear. The Thrush had finished his evening song, and the Blackbird was tired of whistling his pure, deep music from the holly-bush, and even the Robin had gone to roost in the ivy near the keeper's cottage. Flies were humming round the tree-tops, and looked like little travelling clouds of smoke, but the sight and sound of these faded away and left us silent and alone with Nature. I shall never forget that evening. It was one of those

perfect hours spent with Nature that live in the memory, and remain photographed like a living picture in the mind's eye. We sat there until the moon was high in the dark sky of night; we saw the stars of evening gleam out one by one, until they shone out bright and clear in a blacker background. A still mist slowly gathered in the meadow before us; and behind, the tall, silent trees looked like stately sentinels guarding the vast army of birds that were sleeping, and trusting in the safety of their leafy solitude.

While sitting there it seemed to us as though we had seen two worlds. First the trees, tall bracken, and meadows tinted in the soft, fading light of the sinking sun; and then the new world, lit up with the paler light of the moon—quite different in its aspect from the scene of the day.

We heard the birds of the night; Brown Owls hooted, and Nightjars rattled out their notes and ever and anon broke the beautiful silence. Large moths darted past us, and rabbits coming from their burrows stared around them, and then hobbled slowly out into the misty meadow.



Lesser Black-backed Gull turning in its flight.
Magpie on the look-out for plunder.

But still these two Nature-lovers sat amongst the bracken and talked—talked of the days that had gone—and in that short time we lived many a Bird-land adventure over again, and discussed many an exciting hunt that had taken place in the very wood in which we were. Yes, they were happy days—those that had passed; and how long we should have gone on talking I do not know, but a loud blast from the keeper's horn brought us back from those bygone hours, and we jumped up, surprised that it was so late, and hurried towards his cottage so prettily hidden amongst the trees. As we went my friend said, 'Why don't you write these adventures?' I thought over what he said, and eventually I decided to put pen to paper once again and record a few more of our experiences while tracking the birds to their wild lairs.

There comes a time in nearly every boy's life when he has a strong desire to kill something; he feels that he must go into the fields and slaughter the first wild creature that passes him. This passion is no doubt inherited from our far-distant ancestors, who were some of the most cunning and successful hunters the world has produced, and no wonder, then, that this

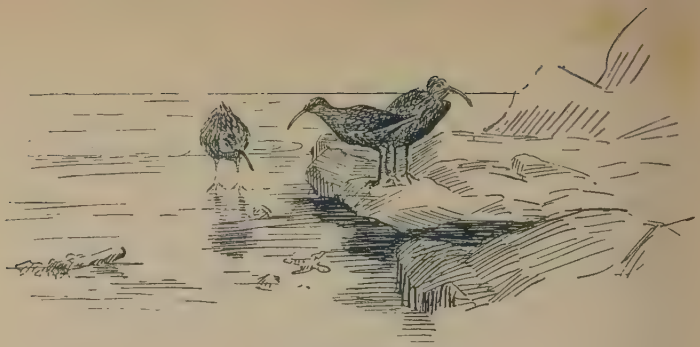
instinct to kill, and follow the creatures of the fields with a gun, is still strong in the boys of the present day.

Now, I myself have experienced this feeling, and I know many others who can say the same; yet I want to try to show that there is more enjoyment to be got out of the camera and field-glass than out of the gun. I have changed from a boy who delighted in killing into a keen lover of birds, and if this book should fall into the hands of any boy, old or young, who delights in killing for killing's sake, then I sincerely hope that he will just give the field-glass a trial. Remember, that just a touch of the trigger of a gun will destroy in a second the most marvellous and glorious thing in the world—life; yet it would take that same person more than a thousand destinies to put back in that little shapeless ball of feathers that wondrous thing that he has so thoughtlessly destroyed. Why, one hour's observation of a rare bird in its haunt through a good pair of field-glasses is more enjoyable than a whole year's gazing at a stuffed specimen in a glass case. The more I use my field-glass the less desire I have to carry a gun, and I can assure my readers that there is a

Head of Red Deer. Young Missel Thrush.

vast deal more enjoyment in a day spent amongst the birds with field-glass and camera than there is in a day with the gun.

I write from experience, for I was as keen a sportsman as it would be possible to find, yet I always feel far happier on my return from a hunt with my camera than I ever did after a day's slaughter. There is more in life than in death, and the more I learn of the country-side the more I am convinced that it is altogether too marvellously great and good to be spoilt and destroyed by man. The flowers, insects, and, above all, the birds are to me like beautiful angels in a paradise of glory, and each and all have a wonderful and mysterious message to tell to those who have ears to hear. The pageant of the seasons, as they pass, is far more wonderful than man has yet realised. We are just awaking from a dream, and the older we grow the more we seem to see through the dim dawn of the breaking day; but Nature is like a glorious summer morning, and as the sun rises slowly to its zenith we see more and more of this vast book, and learn more and more of the marvellous works of a great and a far-seeing God.



CHAPTER II

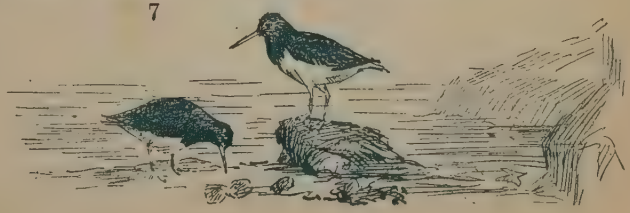
Days and Nights on the Marshes

THE birds of the marsh have always had a peculiar fascination for me. Perhaps it is owing to the difficulty of photographing them. They are certainly not the easiest of feathered sitters to approach with a camera, and it usually happens that when hiding with a camera the photographer is in a very uncomfortable and damp place. Once when endeavouring to photograph a small bird at its nest in the tall reeds on a marsh, I had to wait about eight hours on one of the most uncomfortable seats I ever sat upon. The reeds had been pressed down and formed a fairly dry improvised chair for a time, but as the hours wearily dragged by the black slime underneath oozed through and made it doubly uncomfortable, and all the time I was up to my knees

in the blackest and most dreadful-looking water. Although the bird was at her nest a good part of the day none of the photographs were really successful.

It is not easy work, searching for nests on a marsh. One has to wade most of the way, and sometimes feel for every footstep, for on some of the larger inland marshes over which I have travelled there have been very treacherous pools. A few years ago a small party were searching for nests on a Norfolk marsh, and one of us had just succeeded in making a really unique exposure of a Cuckoo, when suddenly photographer and camera disappeared under the surface, but presently emerged not much the worse for a ducking, although the camera was not improved and the plate just exposed was spoilt.

One of the shyest and most retiring birds I ever photographed was the Water Rail. Even keepers and others that practically live on the marsh seldom see this small, slender bird, and only once during my travels in Bird-land have I seen it, and that was when I took the accompanying photograph. It makes its home in the reeds and grasses of marshy districts, threading



its way through these with the greatest ease, and running fast if alarmed. It does not take to its wings unless absolutely obliged.

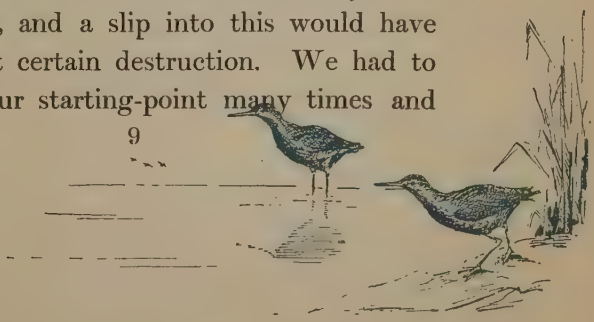
It has been said that the Water Rail if pursued will, instead of flying, hide in a tuft of grass or a hole. After taking all the photographs required I put this to practical test. I rushed after the bird, and it simply ran away, and then crouched or squatted near a tuft of grass, and when I placed my hand near it to pick it up, the Rail turned over on its side and pecked me. I held it in my hand for a time and then I allowed it to fly away. It travelled for about fifty yards and alighted amongst a mass of rushes, where there was plenty of shelter, but this remarkable little bird allowed me to pick it up again, and I had a most interesting half-hour with it. At last it went down to the lakeside and swam away. When on the water it looked exactly like a small Moorhen, and reminded me very much of this bird in all its actions.

The marsh is hardly the place where one would expect to meet with adventures, yet on one occasion in a large swamp in Hampshire, while searching for nests of the Snipe, we had

Water Rail searching for food.
Water Rail about to enter the water.

rather a serious experience. In a large open space, surrounded with dense forest, we saw a very attractive marsh, and as there were several Snipe 'bleating' overhead we decided to search for their nests, little knowing that the swamp was really a very dangerous bog. So, slinging our cameras over our shoulders, we carefully picked our way over the grass tufts and eventually found ourselves some distance out, and as we got farther away from solid ground the large tufts of grass on which we stood seemed to have less support. We searched many of the most likely places, but did not find any Snipe's nests, and later on decided to return.

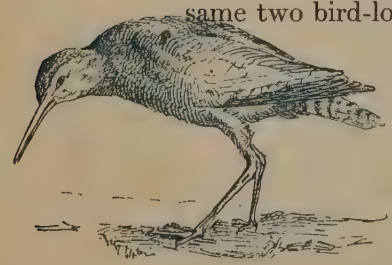
Now our troubles began, for we found it no easy matter to retrace our steps, and many a time we had to return to a part we had just left, for the grass tufts or stepping-stones seemed to be much farther apart, and it was impossible to jump on to some. It was also quite impossible to wade between, for we found, by sinking our tripod legs, that the depth of water, or rather thick, soft mud, was considerably more than six feet, and a slip into this would have meant almost certain destruction. We had to go back to our starting-point many times and



try fresh routes, and at one place we passed the whole bog seemed to quake with our weight. What added to our feelings of discomfort was the discovery of the skeleton of a cow. The creature had reached this spot and evidently found it impossible to return; and the skeleton told us in a terrible manner what our fate would be if we missed our footholds. With the aid of our tripods we were able to leap from one mound to another, and several times, after such a jump, we stood still, while the surrounding swamp for twenty yards trembled, as it were, with the impact. However, at last we got nearer to solid land, and were able to find our way to safety.

It had taken us far longer to traverse that swamp than we had imagined, and we were very thankful to get off it. The next time we explored such bogs we made it our business to discover beforehand something about the dangers of the place.

This little incident happened during my first expedition away from home after birds, although all my life I had studied them in my own district; but since then, nine years ago, the same two bird-lovers, who have been close com-

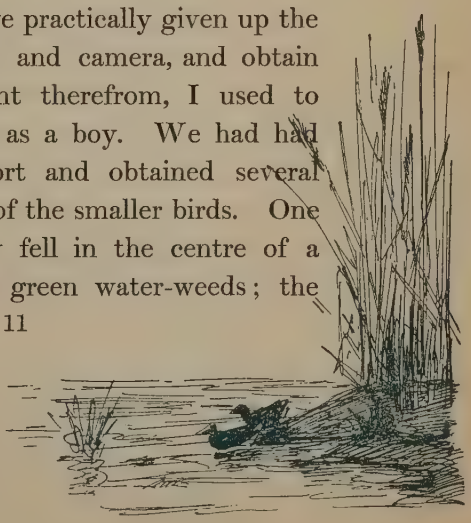


Reed Warbler's nest. Snipe's nest.

panions since their first days at school, have travelled many thousands of miles in the pursuit of their hobby. Still, some of those early adventures of ours live in the memory, and are very interesting to look back upon. Even when we were at school every spare moment that we had was given to the study of Nature, and as we had few books on the subject and pocket-money was scarce, nearly all our knowledge was taken first-hand from Nature. In fact, nearly all our knowledge of birds has been learnt from living specimens in a wild state.

I should like, if I may digress a moment from the subject of this chapter, to go back a few years and record one or two early adventures, which, although not actually about the birds of the marsh, have something to do with marshy districts.

Although now I have practically given up the gun for the field-glass and camera, and obtain a deal more enjoyment therefrom, I used to collect in a small way as a boy. We had had a good morning's sport and obtained several satisfactory specimens of the smaller birds. One of these unfortunately fell in the centre of a pond overgrown with green water-weeds; the



water itself was black and had rather strong effluvia. A fence which looked fairly strong ran across the water, dividing it in half, evidently a boundary mark. The bird had fallen near this, and a friend who was with us at once volunteered to crawl along the fence and fetch the bird. This youth was rather unfortunate where water was concerned—in fact he had a reputation for falling into it, and on three occasions while out with us he had disappeared under the surface of lakes, ponds, or rivers. Once he fell through the ice, again he upset a boat on a river, and, besides getting soaked himself, half drowned the other occcupants, and the third dipping I am just about to describe.

He crept carefully along the fence, holding on to the top with one hand, and then leaned over until he could pick up the bird. He had almost succeeded in his task, when there was an ominous crack, a loud splitting of wood, a piercing yell, and our plucky friend was under the surface, struggling and kicking to get ashore. Presently his head and shoulders emerged from this awful slough of despond, and a few seconds later we had hauled him ashore, and he stood

on *terra firma*—a wet, black object, his ears, neck, pockets, sleeves, and trousers full of evil-smelling black slime and water.

Here was an exciting state of affairs. We could do nothing but sit down and laugh at him, but when our mirth had cooled down a little, and our brave companion had shown us the bird which he had so gallantly retrieved, we set to work to clean him. All his clothes were taken off, and we endeavoured to wash them in some cleaner water near by, and then hung them on the lower branches of trees, while he ran round the field to keep warm. At last we had the clothes dry, or nearly so, and later in the day he went home, a journey of about eight miles, and was none the worse for his dipping. Now that the old days have gone past recall, we often laugh long and heartily when we talk over the one and only washing-day we ever had.

One day we saw some Moorhens swimming on a marsh or large pond some distance away in a large meadow and we made our way thither to see if they had commenced to lay eggs. No sooner had we reached half-way between the hedge and pond when we heard a noise like distant thunder, and looking up the meadow we

saw, to our horror, about fifty wild bullocks tearing full speed towards us. We instantly turned and ran for our lives, but never did a hedge seem so far away, and never had we known cattle to run so fast. It looked at first as though we should be overwhelmed by them before we reached safety, but luckily for us we managed to get to the hedge just in time, and throwing ourselves down we scrambled through, while only a few yards behind the cattle thundered past. It was a long time before we ventured into that field again, and when we did a sharp look-out was kept for four-footed enemies.

I mentioned that we used to collect specimens, and our expeditions took us into many famous bird haunts. Some of the days and nights we spent on the Essex marshes or mud-flats at the mouth of the Thames will for ever remain vividly pictured in my mind, for we had with us then a dear friend who was a keen Nature-lover, and who, if he had lived, would have made a name in the Natural History world. But he, and also the author of this book, both had a long and serious illness at the same time, although suffering from different complaints. One recovered, the

Kingfisher waiting for his prey.

other died, and never was a friend missed more; for, besides being one with us in our Bird-land rambles, he was also the best of companions.

A night on an Essex marsh is an experience the bird-lover will never forget. There is something wonderfully weird and attractive about it. The large, deep-coloured moon rising slowly beyond the vast flat expanse, gradually changes the mud-heaps and pools of water from gnomes or ghost-like objects into things of definite shape. As we trudge along or stalk carefully with our gun behind a sea-wall or ditch-bank, ever and anon we hear a flutter of wings, and a dim form disappears into the gloom. Then in the distance we hear a faint *quack! quack!* ever growing louder; we imitate the call, and the flock of Ducks flies over the spot where we are hiding. Three loud, sharp shots ring out, and boom and boom over the marsh, only dying away over the cold, grey sea. We trudge forward and pick up our game, and after waiting until the sea-mist has almost chilled our bones, we trudge back to our lodging. The moon being higher gives more light, and

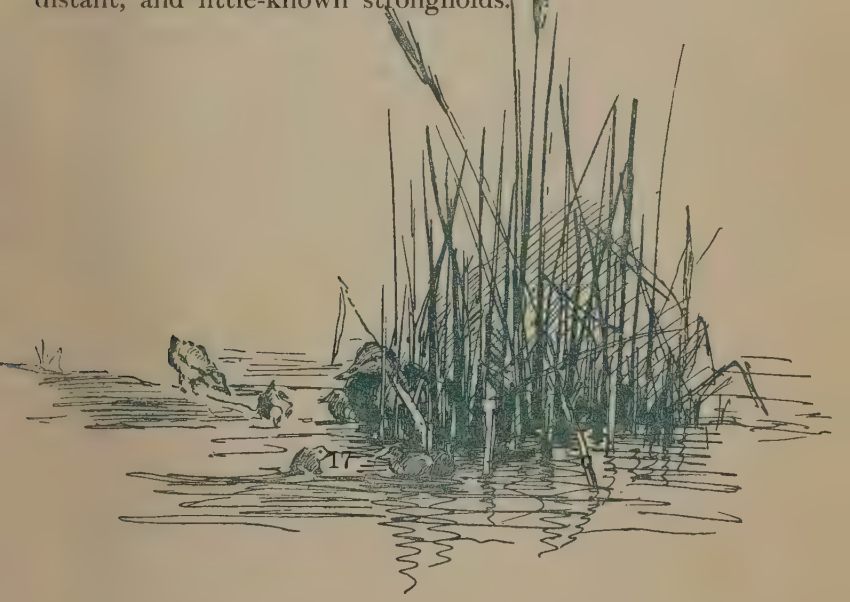
we see strings of Geese flying down to the water's edge. Curlews, Redshanks, and Plovers call, giving the friendly alarm to their comrades as we homeward go, and when our lodging is reached we feel ready for an early morning meal, and after that—bed.

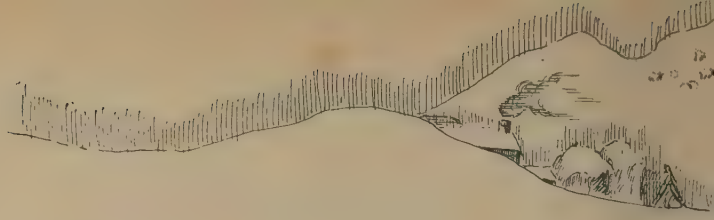
The more we learned in our boyhood days of Nature the stronger grew our desire not to kill, and as season followed season we used the gun less and the field-glass more, and as we were keen photographers—my first photograph, by the way, was taken when I was thirteen years old, with an apparatus costing three shillings and sixpence complete, and very proud I was of that camera—it was only natural that our attention was turned to photographing birds, mammals, and insects. And now it is my ambition to try to reach other boys, to tell them my experiences, to endeavour to help them to turn their thoughts to Nature, and to be able to read the open book which is spread before them in the woods, in the fields, and by the sea-shore.

Although I once loved to kill, and in my spare hours I did collect many specimens, yet at the same time I learned to love Nature,

and now that the gun is put away, and the field-glass and camera have taken its place, Nature is all the sweeter, and every blade of grass in the meadow has a story to tell me, every flower has a song, and the birds—why, every one brings me, as it were, a beautiful message from an almost unknown world.

And as the years drifted past we still followed the birds, and a desire to penetrate into the haunts of rarer species haunted us, and whenever the opportunity presented itself we made expeditions, short ones at first, into fresh fields and pastures new, until later we tracked even the rarest species to their wild, distant, and little-known strongholds.





CHAPTER III

Winter in Bird-land

WHEN walking through the country in the months of winter we are often asked, 'Where are the birds?' Although the woods and fields are depopulated to a very great extent, yet the birds are to be found if we know where to look for them. At that joyous time of the year, when the trees, hedgerows, and meadows are putting on spring's first touch of green, then it is that millions of feathered visitors pour on to the shores of this country, and then, after resting, travel inland to their respective haunts. I do not think it is generally known that these small travellers, although they journey many thousands of miles, return to the self-same spot in Old England year after year. The eave Swallows, or Martins, that make

Black-headed Gulls. Snipe squatting in snow.

their little mud homes under the gutters of your house one year, are in very many cases the same pair that built their nest there last year and seasons before that.

So it is with nearly all our migrants. Year after year, with the approach of spring, these myriads of birds arrive, to spend about five months in our woods, lanes, and meadows, and when the autumn arrives, with its cold mists and fading foliage, these same birds, which have done their chief duty in life—reared a family—return with their young over the continents and seas that they travelled over in the spring, back to their winter homes. When our summer fades away and begins to give place to winter, then these little creatures, which love warmth so much, fly towards the lowering sun, and eventually find themselves in summer again. What a glorious existence, a life in eternal summer, amongst the flowers, song, and sunshine!

Many imagine that with such a countless number of birds leaving our shores, the countryside must be sorely drained. Such is certainly the case for a week or two, but soon after this army has left another great

army begins to come in, flying south from the colder regions of the north. Thus we see that, although so many birds have left us, yet the country still contains its fair share of birds, through the influx of these winter visitors.

Enormous flocks of Skylarks come over from the Continent to spend a few months with us, but thousands of these never return, to judge by the great quantity strung up in many poultry shops. How any one can eat a Skylark I cannot imagine. Those who do are usually town dwellers who do not know this blithe spirit of the sky as we country-folk do. His song is the chief charm of the spring, the glory of the summer, and the crowning beauty of a bright winter day.

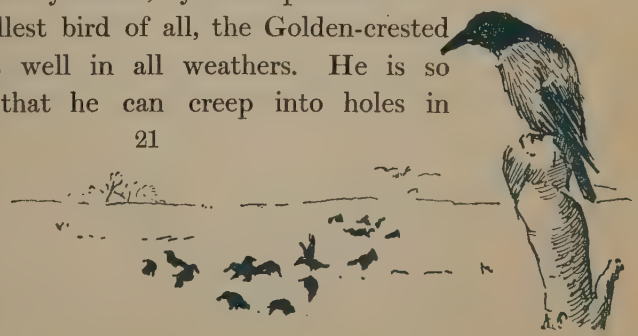
Thrushes, Fieldfares, and Redwings help to swell this incoming feathered army, and, as soon as the weather becomes at all severe, and sometimes before, these birds flock to the hedges, where they feast on the hips and haws, those bright red berries which give such a touch of beauty to the black, leafless branches. It is very interesting to watch them pulling off these berries. Sometimes they take them to one of the old nests in

the hedge and use this as a kind of platform or table on which to break open their food. Many old nests thus serve a double purpose—first as a home in which young are reared, and when these have grown and gone away to other climes, these winter visitors use them as a table or store-room for their food. Field-mice, and rats also, use these nests, and I have sometimes disturbed them as I have passed by.

The Redwing, which at first glance looks very much like a Thrush, can be distinguished from the latter by the bright rust-red feathers under the wings.

It is, however, the small birds which we seem to miss in the open country. Many of these do a very sensible thing in hard weather: they leave the bare, bleak fields and seek the company of man, and we shall find large numbers of these in gardens where food is put out for them. It is a strange fact that many birds which are exceedingly shy and afraid to approach near human beings should, when food is very scarce, fly to his protection.

That smallest bird of all, the Golden-crested Wren, fares well in all weathers. He is so very small that he can creep into holes in



trees, where insects abound, far easier than many birds only half as large again. The Goldcrest, in the winter-time, hunts with several of its own species, and also with the Tits and Tree-Creepers, and I have seen little parties of these diligently searching every tree in an orchard. They first start at one row of fruit-trees, carefully work this, and then pass on to the next. Every part of the tree seems to be carefully searched. Tree-Creepers take the stouter branches, commencing right down at the bottom of the main trunk and gradually working up to the top; while the Goldcrests and Tits hang head-downwards, like so many little acrobats, on the more slender and swaying branches.

I was once greatly interested in watching a pair of Goldcrests in an apple-tree, and so intent were they on the diminutive insects which they occasionally unearthed that they did not notice me. Nearer and nearer they approached to my face, until only a few inches away, and then one left the tree and flew to my boot, but finding that the interested naturalist was not a decayed post or tree-stump, it flew onwards in a great hurry.

Coal Tit.

The most diligent worker of all seems to me to be the Common Wren. This little brown bird, so very small that he is often not noticed by the casual observer, is a great hunter. It is remarkable how carefully the Wren will search holes in decayed trees and, going over the same portion time after time, will find many hidden treasures. He will tap, tap, at the wood until a sleeping insect is roused, and then instantly snaps it up. At other times, he will fix his little feet firmly in the trunk, and then pick away the wood of a decayed tree or post, and so find tiny beetles which may be hiding there. In fact there is no end to his ingenuity when pressed for food. Sometimes we have seen him, right down underneath the hedges, turning over the fallen leaves, searching for spiders, and no doubt his keen little eyes find many.

The Wren is as knowing as he is small, for on cold nights he finds two or three companions, and they all huddle up together in an old nest, sometimes of their own construction, but often in others. I once watched several going to roost in this way; I noticed them all together in a fir-tree, and then when all had disappeared

I just shook a small branch containing a Finch's old nest and four of the Wrens hopped out, very much surprised at being roused out of their night's lodging.

Many of the larger species of birds suffer very severely through food being scarce. Carrion Crows and Rooks especially feel the pinch of severe weather. I have sometimes seen some of the wildest birds transformed into the meekest and tamest of creatures through hunger. That bold, black outlaw of the air mentioned above, the Carrion Crow, finds it very difficult work to discover sufficient food for his wants, and he will even enter our gardens, and with his loud, harsh *krraar! krraar!* asks pleadingly for food, and will, if the opportunity presents itself, rob or even kill smaller birds. If it should happen that a Pigeon or Magpie, or indeed any bird, should die, then Jays, Crows, and Rooks soon discover the skinny carcase and pull the flesh away from the bones, for these prowlers are ever on the look-out for sickly or dying animals.

The Carrion Crow has been branded as an outlaw, and has a black name in many parts of the country; yet there is a kind and loving

heart behind his dusky feathers. They are most devoted parents, and will feed their young after they are capable of finding food for themselves. The birds mate for life, and if one should die the other will pine for days. In fact, the Carrion Crow is one of the most human-like birds that I know of.

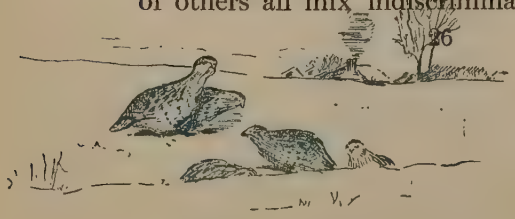
I knew a pair a few years ago which frequented several large meadows near my home. For years past they had nested in one of the tall oaks, but one season the male was shot, and hung up in these very meadows as a 'scarecrow.' The remaining bird would sit for hours on a neighbouring tree, giving out a dismal *krraar!* and trying to call her dead mate back to life. A few days later I found her dead body underneath this very tree, and on examining her I found that there was not a particle of food in her gizzard. She had refused to eat, through sorrow for her lost mate, although food was very plentiful all around.

I have come across incidents in Bird-land that show real love and affection—incidents that would put to shame some human beings that I have known.

The Rook is hardly such a devoted lover, for

in a field near the one mentioned above, one was shot, and tied to a stick near the centre of the field, to act as a warning to other birds. The other Rooks did not seem to mind, however, for one day they were to be seen sitting underneath the carcase, and picking up the fat grubs which continually fell from the decomposing bird above! Surely a case of adding insult to injury.

In very severe weather a great number of birds travel down to our coasts—indeed the whole coast-line of this country is teeming with bird-life, although the largest flocks are seen on the mud-flats of tidal rivers. On the marshes at the mouth of the Thames, and also on other rivers, I have seen flocks of hundreds of thousands of birds, principally the waders. These flocks are always very difficult to approach, but with the powerful Goerz binoculars, which every naturalist who wishes to see wild nature at her best should use, the different species are easily distinguished, and it is interesting to note how they follow the retreating tide and fare exceedingly well on the food left behind. Curlews, Redshanks, Dunlins, Oyster Catchers and a host of others all mix indiscriminately together, and



Great Tit. Robin.

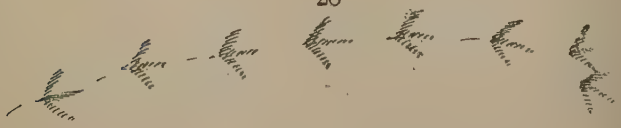
race forward to any food cast up by the ebbing tide. I have seen enormous tracts of shining yellow sand simply covered with these hungry birds, and as we watch them we are simply astonished at their voracious appetites.

I have sometimes heard the expression, 'Why, your appetite is like that of a bird,' meaning that the person spoken to has really no appetite. Yet if we had only the appetite of a bird we should consume, in proportion to the quantity of food they eat, the following: For breakfast, one dozen eggs, a full-sized loaf of bread, and twenty pork sausages. Lunch would consist of six pounds of steak, half a loaf of bread, followed by two legs of mutton and a fair-sized plum-pudding. For afternoon tea we should just have a Genoa cake weighing about a pound, and our dinner would consist of two pounds of fish, a whole fowl, four pounds of roast beef, with ten potatoes and two large cabbages, followed by a pudding weighing six pounds, and four pounds of fruit. Not a bad day's work for one person! Yet this, weight for weight, and bulk for bulk, is less in proportion than some birds consume in one day.

Why, the Lapwing will swallow four large

worms and then eagerly look out for more. Fancy a human being eating a whole leg of mutton and then settling down to eat another with an appetite equal to the task! 'Only the appetite of a bird' is an expression that should not be applied to invalids. Sometimes, after starting out in the early morning, and returning at night, after a hard day's work in Bird-land, I have had a healthy appetite, but nothing at all to equal that of a bird.

The Kingfisher will consume almost its own weight of food each day, and in hard weather, when the ponds and streams are frozen over, it goes to the coast. In winter the birds of these Islands are constantly passing from one point to another, and when the food in one district is devoured they flock together and usually fly south to discover fresh haunts. Last winter, while on a lecturing tour in the south-west of England, I noticed that the hedgerows and meadows were full of bird-life. These little travellers had left the more northerly counties, which were covered with snow, and had travelled south to fresh hunting grounds where food was more abundant.



Pheasant

CHAPTER IV

Do Birds Love Sport?

WHEN watching some of our larger birds of prey chasing and capturing a small bird or other animal, I have often asked myself the question: 'Do birds love sport?' If they can appreciate the exciting hunts that they have before they can enjoy a meal, then they must indeed have a life that many keen sportsmen might envy. In this chapter I want to try to describe a few of these blood-stirring adventures which are daily taking place in Birdland, and which may be often seen when in the haunts of the birds mentioned.

I want my readers to journey with me, for many long miles, away to the wild northern islands. The exact spot need not be mentioned, for I know of several egg-looters who would be pleased of any hints as to the locality, but who

will not succeed in getting that information from me. Let us imagine that we are quite invisible, as I always like to be when photographing birds. We are in a wild scene; for if we look inland there is nothing but a bleak, far-stretching moor, covered with grey grass, wind-torn, all the blades bent in one direction away from the sea. There are no trees, no bushes, just the grass and bare rock as far as the eye can penetrate, and away in the extreme distance a range of blue hills almost blend in with the pale sky of an early spring. If we look to the sea, the view is just as wild—large, cold-grey waves flecked with white foam rolling in, one following the other in an unceasing procession, from the great limitless Atlantic, and breaking with an echoing roar on the fantastically water-carved black rocks fringing the desolate shore. Some of the towering cliffs are bright in the sun, others are bathed in the blackest shadows, for the coast winds and twists about like the coils of a snake. Black holes are seen in some of the rocks, and these large caves have probably never been properly explored except by the rock-pigeons which make such cold, damp, dark places their home. The

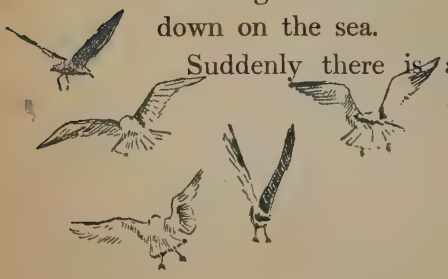
Red Deer. An early morning drink.

entrances are green, for the rocks are covered with a kind of moss of the most brilliant colour, and large drops of water fall from the roof and land with echoing 'plops' on the shelves of rock between. But no matter how cold, or how damp, the rock-doves and many half-bred species of pigeons, which have escaped from some civilised spot, make the caves their home. The cliffs above are dark and bare, the piercing winds, driving in from the sea, allow of no vegetation growing thereon, with the exception of grass and a few sea-pinks. It is a picture of Nature at her wildest, but nevertheless wonderfully grand and awe-inspiring.

As we now stand on the summit of a gigantic precipice there is little of life to be seen. But as our eyes become accustomed to the height, we see far down below a number of tiny white dots, floating dreamingly over the waves; when we examine these through our field-glasses, we find that they are large birds. The majority are Herring Gulls, flying over the water, while with them are one or two other smaller species.

Glancing above, we see coming swiftly across the moor, at a great height, a large bird. It

is so large that we cannot well mistake it, and when it gets nearer we recognise the new-comer as the White-tailed Eagle, or, as some call it, the Sea Eagle. When near us, we hear the rush of the great pinions through the air, then swooping round, with a magnificent curve, the large bird at last settles on a prominent rock almost on the edge of the cliff. He seems to glory in his solitude, and is so unconscious that he is being watched. Soon after alighting on the rock he ruffles all his feathers and gives them a violent shaking, then preens some of them with his large, hooked beak, and seems very much concerned over a certain feather on one wing, which will not lie quite straight. However, at last his toilet is completed, and he almost seems to squat on his perch; his neck is drawn in and his big head is almost hidden in his feathers. One would imagine that he was miserable and uncomfortable, yet that bird is not half such a fool as some might think, for those dreamy eyes, which are half closed in the glare of the sun, are watching most intently those small dots far down on the sea.



Suddenly there is a marvellous change in

White-tailed Eagle

his whole appearance. What a moment ago seemed to be a bird with no life in him, is now transformed into the angry and eager hunter ready for a mighty battle. His wings are raised at the shoulders; he bends forward and crouches, the tail being almost level with the head. He seems to be looking down towards the sea, and, following his eyes, we notice that a Gull has left its companions, and is flapping leisurely up the face of the cliff. It has come over half-way up and is still three hundred feet below us, but still rises. The Eagle crouches lower, his wings are raised higher, the crest on the head is lifted, and the eyes seem to be flashing out beams of excitement. The Gull ascends another hundred feet, and we notice that in its beak there is a large fish.

Then as we watch, wondering what is going to happen, the Eagle suddenly, like a great feathered dart, throws himself out into space, and goes full speed after the terrified Gull, which just in the nick of time sees its danger, turns and goes full-speed down wind, towards the sea. It knows that there is little hope of escape, yet at the same time it realises that the only chance of saving its own life

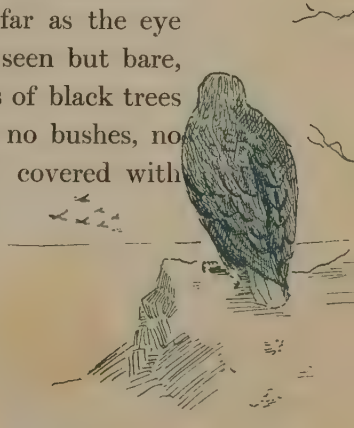
is to go with the wind as hard as it can fly and down to the sea. We hold our breath with excitement as we watch this marvellous aerial race; the pursued is straining every muscle to elude the great brown phantom following, and it twists and turns about in the air, and in this way gains a few yards on the Eagle. The Gulls below see the race, and with loud cries leave the water and fly hurriedly to the cliffs. The larger bird gains, and then, opening its great pinions wide, it goes up with a majestic swoop, rises for fifty feet above the Gull, then, bringing his wings to his side, with a mighty rush and roar the Eagle goes down upon his quarry.

The latter, just in the nick of time, dodges sharply to the right, gives out a piercing scream, and in so doing drops the fish. The striker, missing his mark, falls forward for fifty feet, then recovering himself hovers for a second in the air, carefully takes stock of the position of the fish which is tumbling and turning over and over in its journey to the waves, and, closing his wings to his side and ducking his head, drops like a big stone after the fish, and with marvellous skill picks it up in his talons.

Then he flies back to his perch on the top of the cliff, and enjoys a hard-earned meal, for the Eagle is a knowing old bird, and prefers a freshly caught fish to the tough, skinny flesh of an old Herring Gull. If he had succeeded in striking the latter dead it is very probable that he would not have attempted to eat it.

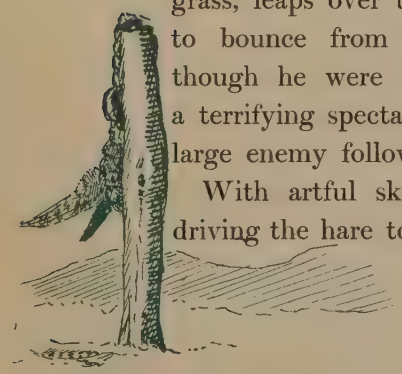
The Gull, when he escaped so luckily, still dashes on and on, and does not rest until he has joined his noisy companions far below, and it is not until the Eagle has left his perch and flown far out to sea, away to the distant rocky islands, that they again venture out. If the White-tailed Eagle can only half appreciate sport as we human beings understand it, then he must have a truly glorious existence—a life that many keen sportsmen would give half they possess to enjoy.

Let us now travel inland many miles away from the sea. We find ourselves in one of those wild, undulating tracts of country known as a deer forest. For as far as the eye can travel there is nothing to be seen but bare, bleak moorland, and large patches of black trees on the higher hills. There are no bushes, no hedges, just vast tracts of land covered with

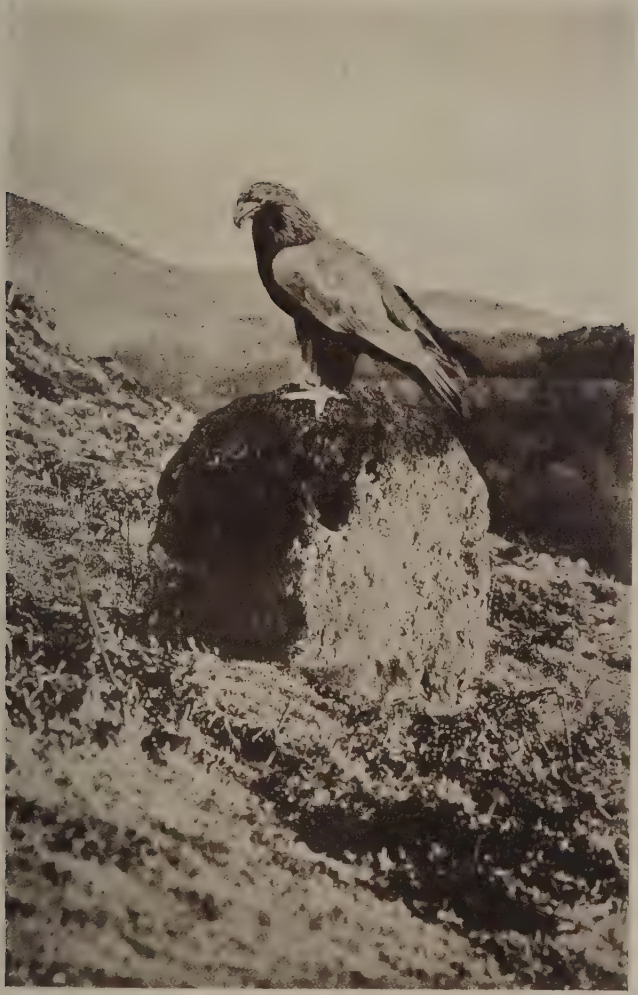


straggling mountain grass and grey boulders. On one of these, in a prominent position on the sloping steep, there sits a large brown bird. His head is moved anxiously from side to side, and every movement in that great landscape is being carefully noted by his keen eye.

Suddenly the Golden Eagle is motionless, and seems to be looking anxiously at a small light patch some two hundred yards away. We also look in that direction, and as our eyes catch sight of the light-coloured patch, we recognise that it is a blue mountain hare. At the same instant it seems to be conscious of danger and runs away. Almost before we can turn our eyes from the hare to the Eagle, the latter opens his enormous wings, seems to leap up into the air, and, like a dart flung from a great catapult, he goes down after the bolting hare. The latter simply dashes through the grass, leaps over the stones, and seems almost to bounce from one boulder to another, as though he were as light as air. It must be a terrifying spectacle to the animal, to see this large enemy following.



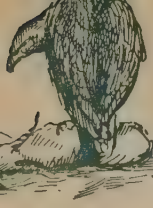
With artful skill the Eagle seems to be driving the hare to an open space further down



Golden Eagle.

the hillside. Then mounting up higher above it, he gives one or two vicious flaps with his pinions, and we hear the feathers whistling through the air, and the next second, with a loud bark, he comes down with a thud upon the bolting streak of blue. A terrified cry rings out far over the lonely moor, there is a scuffle on the ground, and as the king of hunters flies leisurely away, those large wings lifting him up towards the sky, to his eyrie on the distant mountain-side, we see a shapeless mass of blue fur dangling from his sharp talons. And thus ends one of those little tragedies that are happening every day in Birdland.

I regret that I am not able to show a photograph of a Golden Eagle's eyrie. It is not for the want of trying, for in one nesting season alone I travelled in all just over seventeen hundred miles in the hope of finding one of these rare nests. I was disappointed, however, for the only nest discovered could not be photographed. It was in such a 'tight' situation, that it would have been impossible for mortal man to get to it. I returned home, without the picture that I wanted so much, and two days after my return I had a letter from



a keeper to say that a nest was discovered containing two young, and it was in such an easy place to photograph that a lady had accompanied him to the eyrie, and taken some snapshots with a hand-camera! Such news was almost enough to make a keen bird-photographer's hair turn grey with disappointment, for I had neither time nor cash to make another long journey.

On another visit to Scotland, I was on the track of several nests, but was in every case foiled by that spoiler of bird-life, the egg-collector, being on the scenes before me and robbing the nests. However, I am not beaten yet, and before very long I hope to be able to picture this nest in a future work, with eggs and young, and say something more about the home-life of this king of the birds of prey.

There is a story told about the Golden Eagle, only an old legend, but none the less interesting. I expect that many of my readers have heard it, but I think it will bear repeating.

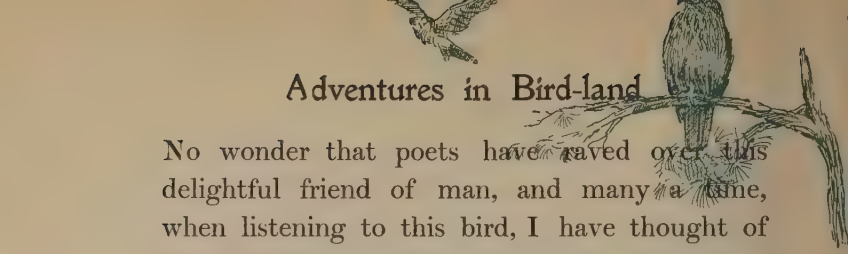
A great many years ago, or I believe I should commence in the good old-fashioned way,—Once upon a time, all the birds of the forest, the field, and the shore, the feathered inhabitants of

Whitethroat in her bower.

marsh, moorland, and dale, met together in a large meadow for the purpose of electing a king. They discovered that they had no ruler in Bird-land, and after a long, noisy discussion lasting over many days, they decided to choose their ruler by flight. That is, the bird which could soar the highest was to be elected king of the birds. At a given signal every bird in that vast assembly flew up. A few minutes later very many returned to earth, for there are several species in this country which very seldom use their wings, and these were content to watch the exciting race to the skies.

Eventually there were only three birds left. One of these was the Kestrel, that beautiful little brown Hawk of the countryside; he was going up in large spiral circles, ever seeming to get nearer to the blue, but at last he had to give in, and, stretching out his wings, he floated slowly down.

Another bird that was still rising was the Skylark. He sang all the way on his aerial journey, and the birds below, although they could not see the bright little singer, knew that he was still soaring, for the notes which could be heard below were so happy, blithesome, and free.



No wonder that poets have raved over this delightful friend of man, and many a time, when listening to this bird, I have thought of those beautiful and inspiring words of the poet Shelley:—

'Hail to thee, blithe spirit, bird thou never wert,
That from heaven, or near it, pourest thy full heart
In profuse strains of unpremeditated art.

Higher still and higher, from the earth thou springest,
Like a cloud of fire; the blue deep thou wingest,
And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest.

In the golden lightning of the sunken sun
O'er which clouds are brightening, thou dost float and run;
Like an embodied joy, whose race is just begun.'

But at last his race was finished, and the Skylark returned to the meadows a tired and disappointed bird. There was now only one bird left—the great Golden Eagle—and instead of being content with having soared higher than his rivals, he went up as high as even his strong and powerful wings would carry him, and then with a loud cry of triumph proclaimed himself King of the Birds.

Singing Skylark perched on a post on the edge of a sea cliff.

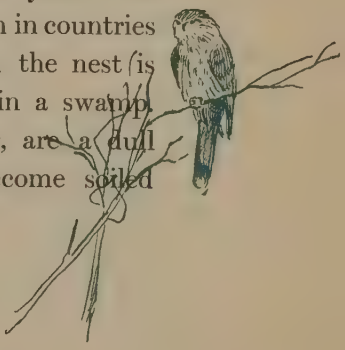
(See page 178.)

But no sooner had he done this than there was a movement amongst the thick feathers of his back, and the smallest bird of all—the Golden-crested Wren—which had been in hiding all this time, fluttered out, and with a tiny song of victory, flew up and above the highest flight of the Eagle!

Even to this day this diminutive bird has on its little head a crest, or crown, of the purest gold, and when watching these Wrens searching for insects in bushes or trees, one is reminded of this pretty story, for the birds repeatedly lift their crests and look exceedingly beautiful in the bright sun.

One of the scientific names of the Goldcrest is 'Regulus,' which, being translated, means 'a little king,' and if the legend were only true, then I think my readers will agree with me that he well deserves the title of King of Bird-land.

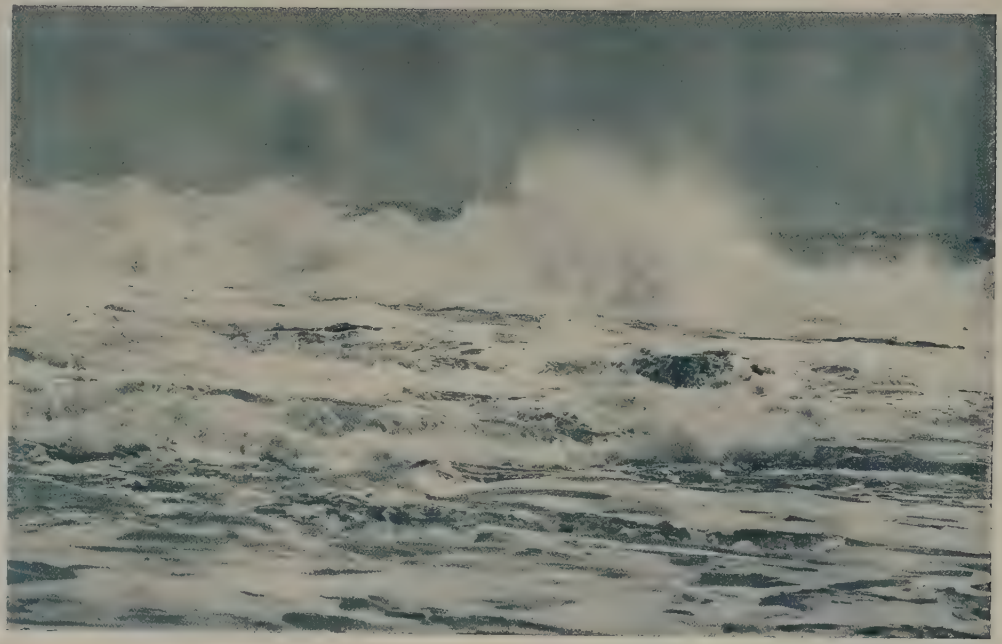
The White-tailed Eagle builds its eyrie in the most inaccessible situations, although in countries where the species is more common the nest is sometimes placed on the ground in a swamp. The eggs, usually two in number, are a dull white in colour, and sometimes become soiled



very much by the sitting bird. I know one or two jealously guarded haunts of these birds, and last nesting season (1906) two pairs of White-tailed Eagles at least were successful in rearing a family in these Islands.

The Golden Eagle's eyrie is not often in a very difficult place to get at. It is a very large structure of sticks, and is usually covered with remains of mountain hares and other creatures that the birds prey upon. The eggs—two, or sometimes three in number—are dull greyish-white, streaked and blotched with rich brown and underlying marks of lilac. One of the eggs, in nearly every instance, is much plainer than the others, and some of these latter are actually white, with no markings.

It is a grand experience to a bird-lover to travel away from the haunts of our lesser birds into the wild country inhabited by the Eagles, and I am looking forward to many more happy days to be spent on the bleak moors which the Golden Eagle makes his home, and on those wild, wave-washed islands where the Sea Eagle is able to roam. I hope the days are not far distant when the egg-collectors, who are at present doing their best to exterminate several



'The sea is mighty, but a Mightier sways his restless billows.'

of our rarest species, will realise the folly of their craze for eggs, and have a little consideration for that larger majority of naturalists who prefer to look on life rather than death, and who would a thousand times sooner watch one of these noble birds of prey, in their mountain fastnesses, for the short space of one hour than be the possessor of their eggs, and know that they were one of the few who helped to drive these birds from their last strongholds.

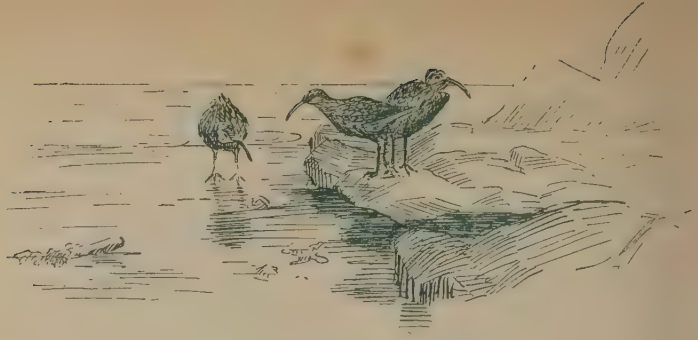
But the more I find out about some egg-collectors—and I am referring to those who take many clutches—the more I am convinced that these men have no conscience. Why, I know of one man who, in the last five nesting seasons, has taken over twenty clutches of Buzzard's eggs, fifteen clutches of Raven's, and two clutches of Kite's eggs, and he would probably have succeeded in taking more of the latter had not the two stalwart sons of a farmer actually caught him, with his collecting box, up a tree containing a Kite's nest, just before he pocketed the eggs. These watchers threatened to give him the thrashing he deserved if he did not come down and clear off the scene. Very much humbled and crestfallen the great collector

descended, and went home minus his box and climbing stock. Now this collector has, or did have, such a vast collection of rare eggs that even he was ashamed to show them, and it passes my understanding how a man could have such a craze for hoarding up eggs that only he could look upon.

But, thank God, the Nature-lovers of the coming generation are of a different disposition, and owing chiefly, I believe, to popular books and lectures on this subject, the boys and girls of England are growing up to love the wild inhabitants of Bird-land, and prefer to see them in their own homes rather than in cages, and instead of taking eggs and making collections they are studying Nature from Nature herself, and they get a great deal more enjoyment out of their country walks and rambles than they would do if they were to destroy life in any way.

I am proud to know that in a small way I have been the means of causing several boys to give up killing and collecting, and the interesting letters I have received from young people after my lectures given in different parts of the country, are very welcome and encouraging

reading to one who is doing his best to guard and protect our fast-disappearing British birds. I shall be pleased to hear from any one who has been induced by this book to take a greater interest in Nature.



CHAPTER V

On the Wild Cornish Shore

THAT very beautiful member of the Crow tribe, the Chough, can now be classed amongst those many British birds which are fast disappearing; for sportsmen, egg-collectors, and that enemy of bird-life which I call the shore pot-hunter are ever on its trail. At the present day the species has been quite driven away or exterminated in haunts where, ten years ago, it was numerous. But there are, I am glad to say, a few wild spots where this handsome bird may still be seen running over the sea-washed rocks, or searching for food amongst the seaweed driven up by the last tide, or perhaps more often in the meadows fringing the shore.

I really think, although at first glance he looks black, the Chough is one of our most beautiful and graceful birds, for with the sun lighting up

Black-headed Gulls.
Where the Chough breeds.

his glossy plumage, and changing it into a coat of metallic blue, which ever changes as he moves, and his long, curved beak and legs of the brightest red, he looks indeed a fine bird. For hardly a second is he still, his keen eyes discover the insects quickly, the seaweed and small stones are turned over with great rapidity, and then, flying on, he settles on a rock, runs over that, and in an incredibly short space of time discovers something to satisfy his appetite.

The Cornish Chough is certainly one of the most restless birds I have ever photographed, and many plates were exposed before a good picture was obtained, although I was giving a rapid exposure. But with the quick focussing arrangement while the plate is in position on the 'Bird-land' camera which I was using, it was possible to follow the bird's movements as he ran from place to place; with an ordinary camera it would have been impossible to photograph it, for if one had had to wait to set the shutter and draw the slide after the bird had been focussed, only failure would have resulted.

The Chough has a pretty exercise during flight. It rises in the air and often utters a note while so doing, and then half-closing its wings,

it descends in a graceful curve, and soon after touching the ground up it goes again, and continues this practice several times.

The Chough searches for its food inland as well as on the sea-shore. Often it is observed long distances from the sea, and has been known to breed in the mountainous districts of Ireland. The birds choose very inaccessible places for their nest—sometimes a hole in the roof of a cave, but more often a small fissure or hole in a steep, perpendicular cliff. The nest is constructed of small sticks, heather stalks, and lined with wool and hair.

For some unaccountable reason the Chough will suddenly desert certain breeding stations, so it is not only the enemies mentioned above who have driven this bird from former haunts. In places where it has once been fairly numerous but is not now seen, it might turn up and attempt again to breed. It is very fortunate for the bird that it has this habit, for if, like some birds, it had stuck persistently to one haunt, it would have been numbered amongst our lost British birds long ago.

Now that we know something about the bird, let us visit his haunt. It was winter

Chough on guard by the calm summer sea.

when I first saw a certain haunt of the Chough on the wild Cornish shore. As we wandered along the grassy cliffs or clambered over the rough, rocky shore, there was an ever-changing panorama opened before us, for this storm-beaten shore has for ages been battered into fantastic shapes by great, rolling billows, which have had three thousand miles of unbroken water behind them ; a great and mighty stretch of sea, which owns no master save Nature's God, and triumphs over the rocks and land. Looking out on such an infinite, tremendous sea we became almost wrapt in a dream of romance, haunted by its terror, its majesty, magnitude, and might. We think of the thousand ships that have been unmercifully bashed to pieces on those black rocks ; we think of the fishermen that go out, never to return, of all the sorrow and unbounded grief that these great, rolling billows have caused, of those unfathomable depths, those dark, unknown regions of the undiscovered sea, of all the mysteries connected with that heaving, surging water, and of all the glory of that 'Great Ocean, strongest of creation's sons.' And through it all there is that long, unending

eternal deep, deep song that rings for ever around our island home, Nature's music, the song of the sea.

And here, on the wild western shore, the waves were coming in, one following the other, and breaking with a mighty roar on the rock-covered sand—tremendous billows, first heaving and ever rising higher as they neared the land, and with a foam-washed ridge turning over, with a power and force which are terrible to watch, they break up into a seething, swirling rushing torrent which is driven into every crevice and fissure in the rocks. Then, as a mighty contrast, the now still water just runs back, trickling and bubbling, to meet another gigantic roller. And now and again there is a lull in this deep bass voice of Nature, then comes a lower monotonous echo as the white foam along the distant shore returns its music to the wind. But again wave follows wave with unconquerable force; they beat and dash, and throw up towers of foam, which is scattered by the driving gale towards the land. Wave follows wave, and rushes and roars on until broken by its own strength; wave after wave, dark-heaving, breaks on the rounded rocks, and

Chough.

hisses and howls in its effort to conquer them. Out by the small rocky islands the waves seem greater, and they are tearing around their black sides, and the whitest spray is ever flying over them.

Through this profound music of Nature's terrible anthem I heard a faint sound, so infinitely small against the fury of the tempest that it was hardly heard, but I recognised the sound, and, looking down the shore, a beautiful black and white bird stood on one of the spray-covered rocks. The Oyster-Catcher repeated his note, and then all lesser sounds were lost in the roar of the storm. But I had seen him, and presently a dozen of his companions joined him, and all stood facing the sea. There they remained, not disturbed in the least by the terror of the storm, but just gazing unconcernedly around. When a greater wave sent a spray over the rock, they flew on into the teeth of the wind, skimming over the billows like a flight of black and white darts, until they were lost to view in the haze of driven foam.

Farther along the shore we found a lovely sandy bay, lying hidden by a circle of black

cliffs and sand dunes. Caves with dark, yawning entrances, showed here and there in the rocks, and on that large stretch of golden sand many a Chough had wandered, and on the cliffs themselves this rare bird had often reared its young. The sea was calmer here, but the waves were driven far in, and travelled right across the gently sloping sand. A large flock of shore birds had settled near the water, and amongst them I recognised Black-headed and Herring Gulls, Oyster-Catchers, Curlews, and Dunlins, and just one Greater Black-backed Gull: an enormous bird he looked as he stood high above all the others. But one of the Curlews spotted me stalking towards them, and with a warning cry he gave the alarm, and the whole flock flew seawards, with the large Gull following. Although he seemed to flap his great wings slowly, the smaller birds were soon overtaken and left behind.

I have seen the Chough's wild haunt in calmer, brighter weather, when the whole of that limitless sea was like a green mirror, with some of the colour of the pale winter sky reflected in its gently moving surface; and

The Chough's haunt. Where the wild breakers roar.
The foam-washed rocks.

around the giant rocks, and along the yellow shore, there was a softer music, given in a sweeter key, a still, almost silent song as the wavelets ran around them or rippled up the sand. The longer I looked out over that sunlit water the more beauties there seemed to be unfolded to me, and it seemed almost impossible that such a picture of peace and grandeur could be transformed into a scene of wild fury. But such is the sea: one day it teaches us lessons of love—in the wavelets we listen to sweet thoughts and solemn sounds—and the next the waves are roaring out their anger, and shrieking, as it were, their terrible notes which speak of Eternity, immensity, and power.

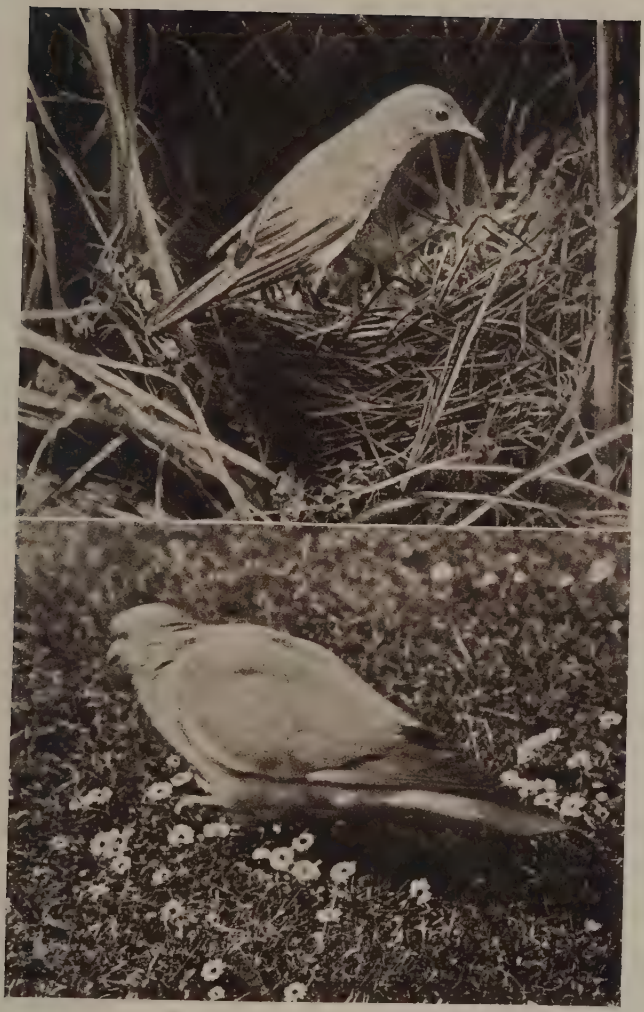
CHAPTER VI

Nightingale Corner

THE Blackbird had wooed and won his dark brown mate, and he was telling all the world around him of the fact; for, sitting on the highest tree above the arbour, he gave out the purest and deepest music to be heard in all the fields around.

The Blackbirds year after year built their nest in Nightingale Corner. I do not know why we called it thus, but perhaps it was because, when passing the spot at night, we sometimes heard beautiful but wild notes coming over from this secluded arbour where three meadows met.

For several days past the two Blackbirds had been collecting grasses, and carrying them to the blackthorn bush, and now the nest was almost completed, and a week later the hen



Whitethroat at Nest.

Wood-Pigeon.

Cover up the body of this bird, and the head has a remarkable likeness to the head of the late Mr. Gladstone.

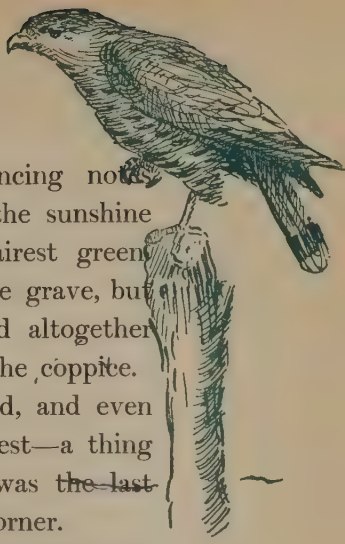
was sitting on four eggs, while her mate was singing to her from above. Day after day he gave out his notes, sometimes from the highest branch of the tall elm, and sometimes from the fence beyond the arbour, while now and again he took his turn at sitting while his mate went off in search of food.

By the time the full number of eggs was laid, the trees above began to get their green foliage, a delicate tint of green at first, slowly changing to a darker hue as the showers and sunshine caused the leaves to open. The Willow Wrens, too, had arrived, there was always a pair in Nightingale Corner, and they were repeatedly uttering their merry, chiming notes from the branches. Chiff-Chaffs also, after their long thousand-mile journey, rested in the arbour before going on to their nesting site by the river.

I have known this little green, secluded spot almost as long as I have known the birds, and many an hour in my boyhood days was spent there. It always attracted my attention. Almost in the centre of this green arbour there was a small stone, and on it, printed in black letters, were the words, 'In Loving

Memory.' We always paused at this spot. Although we never learned the history connected with the grave, we always had a great reverence for it. In the early days of spring the first crocuses and snowdrops were always found there. Bluebells also bloomed beneath the overhanging branches, and later on, when one or two primroses showed their pale faces by the almost hidden mound, the Nightingale arrived. The grave was hidden from the gaze of the outside world by trees, surrounded with spring's sweetest and best flowers, and the arbour filled with the song of many birds. Sometimes, when we passed along the road, beyond this secluded place, at night, we heard the mournful notes of the Nightingale sinking almost to a whisper, and then bursting forth into a triumphant chant that it would be hard to express in words.

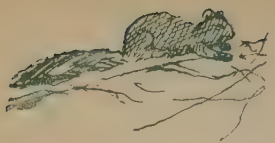
We always went to Nightingale Corner for those first bright flowers of spring, which we always loved so well, and when they showed their blue and yellow discs from the grass by the grave we knew it was time for the Willow Wren to arrive, and this arbour was often the place where we first heard or saw the spring



migrants, for they gave their dancing notes from the tallest branches, where the sunshine was tinting the twigs with the fairest green. Sometimes a Blackcap sang over the grave, but his notes, although so pure, seemed altogether too loud for this sacred corner of the coppice.

The Blackbirds reared their brood, and even had another family in the same nest—a thing the Blackbird often does; but it was the last time they tenanted Nightingale Corner.

I tried to find the spot a short time ago, but it was almost impossible to recognise the place. Streets of modern houses covered the once beautiful estate, the arbour had almost disappeared, a wide, gravelled road passed by the old grave, and as I stood looking, my thoughts flashed back to those boyhood days and the hours we had spent in or near the now changed spot. Many of our old hunting grounds have been obliterated by that spoiler of the country-side—the modern builder. That great city, London, is stretching out its arms farther and farther each year, and the once beautiful country around is being covered with long rows of ugly, symmetrical buildings. Why is it that so few builders put art into their work?



As I stood looking at the old haunts, now so much changed, I thought of the birds that always built there, of the Willow Wrens and Nightingale; and as I turned to go away I heard some notes from the old oak in the road, the tree in which the Flycatcher always had a nest, and looking up I saw the Blackbird sitting on a high branch and singing; but the music had not the ring and love in it of the bird which sang over the blackthorn bush not so many months before.

Hedge-Sparrow's nest.

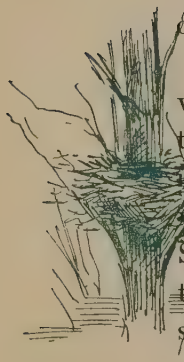
This picture was taken from one of the Author's lantern slides, and in the original is photographed in its natural colours.

CHAPTER VII

Bird Life on a Welsh Lake

DURING those enjoyable weeks spent in wild Wales, when I have been after our rarer breeding birds, I have on three occasions snatched a day to visit a charming lake hidden amongst the hills. Green meadows slope up from the reed-fringed shore to nearly half the height of the hills, and above these there is simply mountain grass and heather. From this hollow amongst the mountains we are able to get a very extensive view. The hedges dividing the meadows have a queer appearance; the lower portion of the hills is covered, as it were, with a fantastic chequered carpet of varying tints of green, and no two meadows are of the same shape. The farm buildings are dotted about, and we can tell where they stand, for around them there are

always more trees. On the higher portions of the hills there are many white dots, and through our glasses these are seen to be sheep.



The lake itself is a large, silvery sheet of water, surrounded with tall, flowering reeds—taller near the shore, and gradually diminishing in size until, farthest from the meadows, they were just level with the water. Many white Swans were dotted about the lake; there were twenty-seven of these graceful birds in all, and some had enormous nests constructed of reeds, containing four or more large eggs. Others seemed to be courting, and we saw some remarkable exercises. Two birds were facing one another, about one yard separating their beaks, then one turned to its right, and the other did the same, and they revolved round and round as though each was fixed on a pivot. It was an exceedingly pretty bird exercise, and we watched these remarkable birds for over a quarter of an hour with great interest. They almost resembled an accurate machine as they turned in opposite directions with unfailing regularity. When these great birds flew across the lake and came near our boat the roar from their wings was something to be

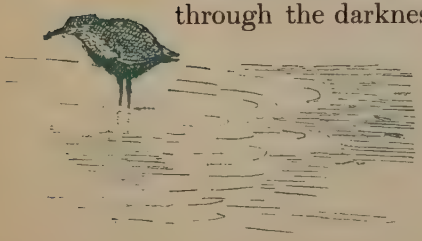
remembered, and sounded like a large motor approaching, while the broad pinions hitting the water with regular strokes could be heard for half a mile.

It is often the case that our most beautiful birds are the most difficult to approach. Certainly this is the case with that handsome water bird, the Great Crested Grebe. At the commencement of the nesting season it is seldom that we can get within one hundred yards of this shy bird as he swims about on the water, but if we should have the good fortune to approach nearer, then we can see what a really beautiful creature he is. On this lake there are usually about fifteen or twenty pairs of this rare water-bird, and owing to the protection afforded them several of these pairs are annually successful in rearing families.

The birds arrive about the second week in February, and commence building their nests in April. One year they were exceedingly unfortunate, for a deluge of rain, lasting thirty-six hours, caused the water in the lake to rise seventeen inches, and all the nests were swamped. It is seldom, however, that the birds have such a misfortune as this.

This Grebe, although met with on several large lakes of these Islands, belongs to our rarer breeding birds. Norfolk is perhaps the Grebe's favourite county, the large broads and reed-beds forming ideal breeding haunts, and it is on these delightful stretches of water that I have often met with them. Many a happy hour I have spent there, where they, the Coots, Moorhens, and chatty reed-birds have been my only companions. I know of no more soul-stirring experience than to be alone with Nature and Nature's God on the Broads at night.

I well remember one glorious evening, when I was out in a small boat. The tall reeds fringing the rivers shut out all view of the county beyond, and there was no sound except the regular splash of my oars striking the water. Coming to a large silent stretch of water I let the boat drift, while I rested on my oars, and seemed verily to be the only living creature in that sublime and awe-inspiring space. But slowly I became more accustomed to the silence, and now and again a sound was recognised as the note of a bird, and as I peered through the darkness and gathering mist I saw



The Great Crested Grebe sitting.

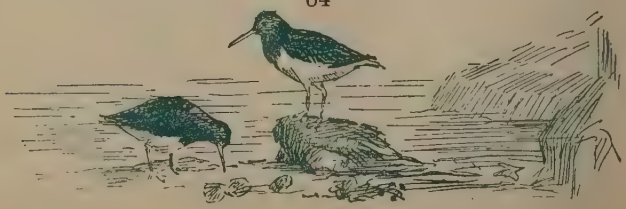
Another view of the same bird.

the bright, clear reflection of a star in the water, broken into a hundred ripples, as a bird of the night swam across the stem of my boat. Then, turning round, I rowed back to the place whence I started, with nothing but the stars to guide my boat, and as the latter glided smoothly through the sluggish stream, and over the open broads, many an unrecognised bird fluttered up and flew away, startled at seeing anything at such a time in their own wild and secluded haunt. Such experiences live in the memory, they remain photographed on the mind's eye as clearly as a bright summer landscape is recorded on the photographic plate. It is following the birds that brings us into such unbeaten tracts, and opens our mind more fully to realise the charm surrounding the great works of an infinite and far-seeing Creator.

But I am wandering away from the Welsh lake. On my first visit we found and photographed two nests of the Grebe, and saw many more birds which undoubtedly had nests. Searching for a Great Crested Grebe's nest is very different from looking for nests of other birds. With the majority of species, and especially those building on or near the water, all

we have to look for is the open nest with eggs. But with the Grebe, one has to search for a very different thing. There are no eggs visible to help you, for immediately the sitting bird hears your boat approaching she covers the eggs over with water-weeds, a supply of which she always keeps near. The nest is built of the same material, and is not very high above the water, and what one has to look for is just a mass of water-weeds. As there are hundreds of such clusters about, which have drifted together and clung round the stems of the taller reeds, it takes the eye of an experienced naturalist to discover it.

We drove our boat into the reeds as far as possible, and then stood up and looked round, and many times were deceived by small heaps of weeds; but eventually we found a nest covered over with wet, shining weeds, and on moving these aside we saw four fresh eggs underneath. It is easy to tell if the eggs are new-laid by their colour. If they have been sat on for long they become dark brown and dirty. The nest was photographed covered, and then the reeds were moved away, and another plate was exposed from the same posi-



Nest of Great Crested Grebe (covered).
The nest (uncovered). The Author's hiding-place.

tion. My readers will thus be able to judge how successful this mode of protection is.

One bright May day, in the year 1905, I visited this lake again with my friend Mr. Percy Player, and those two good Welsh naturalists, the Rev. D. Edmondes Owen and Mr. A. Gwynne-Vaughan, two gentlemen who have done so much to protect the Kite and other rare birds in the Principality. From the picturesque town of Builth Wells we had a most delightful ride in the former gentleman's motor along the Welsh roads and lanes, and at length we came in sight of the lofty hills around the lake. We were soon down by the water's side, and then, rowing off, set to work to discover a nest. After a long search we at last discovered a Grebe's nest, and, taking photographs with the eggs concealed and uncovered, we examined the surroundings to see if it would be possible to secure pictures of the bird sitting.

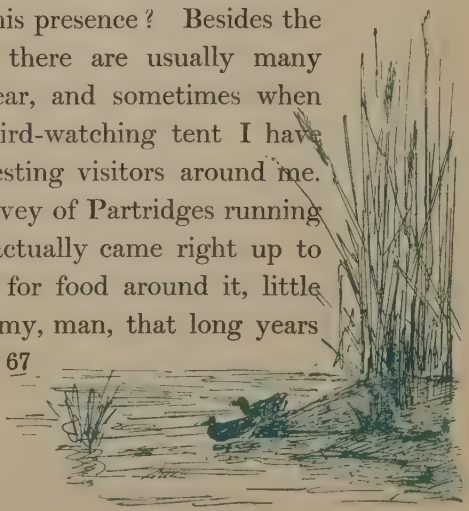
The Grebes belonging to this nest were particularly shy, and we had difficulty in getting within two hundred yards of them, and I thought it would be impossible to photograph the bird on her eggs. However, it is no gain

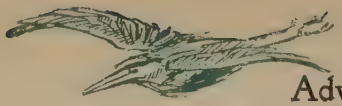
to hurry over such matters, and one must try to overcome the shyness of such birds by slow methods. My plan was to leave a small boat near the nest for three or four days, and build a screen of reeds in the bows of the boat, so that the latter would be almost hidden from the view of the sitting bird. I left instructions with the boatman as to the position of the boat and how to build the screen. He followed these directions carefully, and when I returned nearly a week later everything was in readiness.

We rowed out to where the boat was moored, and when we reached it I was delighted to find that the bird had not deserted her eggs. I was soon stowed away in the small boat with a large piece of sacking thrown right over myself and the camera, and there I anxiously waited for the bird to return. Over an hour passed and there was no sign of the Great Crested Grebe, and I began to think I should fail in my attempts to photograph this wild bird; but as I have only twice been beaten by a bird I did not give in, although I was in a most uncomfortable position and terribly cramped. There was plenty of time yet for the bird to return, for the day was still young. The sun seemed to be exceedingly hot,

and underneath the old sack it was terribly stuffy, but after all, when waiting thus for a bird to return, there is always plenty to interest one. Just outside my boat two Reed Warblers were settling their little differences in a very noisy and warlike way, and the reeds bent and cracked as they darted about amongst them. Then their angry songs and loud, chatty notes all helped to while away the long minutes.

Many people have mentioned to me what a weary time I must have while waiting for and photographing birds; but as a matter of fact the concealed photographer has a most delightful time, for what can be better to a bird-lover than to be within a few feet of his wild friends and watch their everyday manners and customs without their knowing of his presence? Besides the bird I am watching, there are usually many others which come near, and sometimes when hiding in my small bird-watching tent I have had numbers of interesting visitors around me. Once I had a whole covey of Partridges running round me, and some actually came right up to my tent and searched for food around it, little knowing that their enemy, man, that long years





of sport had taught them to dread, was just the other side of a thin piece of canvas, an interested observer of their actions.

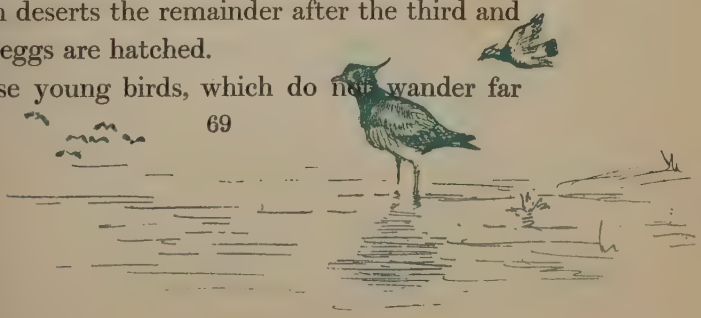
After waiting a few minutes longer I heard a slight noise near the Grebe's nest, and peering through the 'finder' of my camera, I saw the head of the bird I wanted amongst the reeds. For a moment or two it stayed there, then swam near to the nest, and gently touched with its beak the weeds which covered the eggs. Then away it went again, and remained in hiding a little longer; but a few minutes later, without any warning, it swam quickly through the reeds and jumped right on to the nest, uncovered its eggs, and settled down comfortably. I released the shutter and at last succeeded in photographing one of the shyest birds to be found in the country.

I made several exposures during the next four hours of the hen sitting, and then waited a long time for the male bird to arrive; but he did not once come within view of my lens, although three times he brought a bunch of aquatic weeds and gave them to his sitting mate. For some minutes he remained in the shelter of the reeds to the left of the nest, and the hen, reaching

out her long neck, took the weeds from him and placed them by her side.

There were six eggs now in the nest, and as the hen was sitting when she only had four, it goes far to prove what I have always believed, that the hen lays two eggs, sits on these for a few days, and then lays two more. The Little Grebe, a bird which I have written about in two previous works, commences the duties of incubation immediately the first egg is deposited in the nest. Of course, if this is the fact with the large species, two young must arrive before their fellows, and this usually happens; for we notice that while the hen is sitting the male will often have two young following him. He looks upon these as his own special charge, and, not returning to the nest, he goes off and is almost invariably found in a different part of the lake from the hen, when she, a few days later, leads out two more young birds. More than four young are seldom reared, and although I have no facts to prove it, I am strongly of opinion, that if there are more than four eggs in the nest the hen deserts the remainder after the third and fourth eggs are hatched.

These young birds, which do not wander far



from their respective parents, remain with them until fully grown. For a few days after the young leave their shells an exceedingly pretty thing may be seen, for these little balls, which seem thoroughly at home in the water, will jump on to their parent's back and have rides, and I have actually seen the Little Grebe take a family of five young underneath her wings, and then swim for twenty yards under the water, and in this way she carried her babies to supposed safety. If she had but known that it was only a harmless bird-lover watching her, she might have saved herself the trouble.

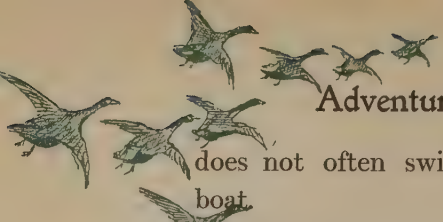
Many a time I have seen the parent dive, and then about forty seconds later come up with a bright, silvery fish or wriggling eel in its beak. On such occasions there is great excitement, for the two youngsters hasten full speed towards their parent, and the one that wins the race takes the prize. Then down she goes again and up comes another fish, and the length of time she remains under the water gives us some idea of the exciting hunts she must have below the surface.

Sometimes I have seen the male swimming with a fish in his beak, and then just as the two

Pied Wagtail's nest.

young have reached him he swallows it himself and dives, seeming as though he were giving his children a gentle hint to earn their own living. The young, when they dive, cannot keep under water for nearly so long as their elders, but I have noticed that some are very successful in their captures of fish.

It is fairly easy to get near these birds with their young if you know how to do it. You must have a fast rowing boat, and then row towards the birds and watch them carefully; for it is possible to tell within a few yards where they will come up after diving. The Grebe, immediately before going under the water, will turn its beak in the direction it wishes to swim, and by carefully noting which way he is looking, and then turning your boat and rowing full speed about thirty or forty yards ahead of where the bird dived in the direction in which its long beak was pointed, you will find that when it comes up you are considerably nearer. The bird, however, notices this also, and dives again quickly; and now is your chance; look at the direction in which his beak points, and pull hard at your oars again, and often you will find that you are able to get quite close, for the bird



does not often swim directly away from the boat.

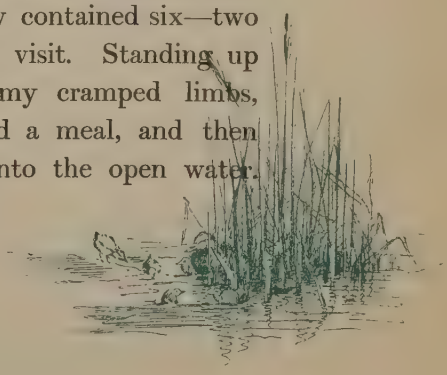
On many occasions I have amused myself by getting within a dozen yards of these shy and beautiful birds by stalking them in this way, and once the male Grebe came up not much more than an oar's length away from the boat; but the instant it discovered its mistake it dived very quickly and swam nearly one hundred yards under water before it dared come up again. I made several exposures with my camera, but it was almost impossible to focus the bird before it dived, and the resulting pictures did not come up to my idea of what a photograph of this kind should be. They are therefore not included in this volume.

When the Grebe was on its nest—to return to my experiences in the boat—it insisted in sitting in one position, and at last I had to drive it off by making a noise. The startled expression that passed over the bird's face was worth seeing, for it could not imagine whence the noise came; however, it had the desired effect, for, leaving the eggs uncovered, it soon returned and changed its position, and I was able to make more exposures. After a dozen plates had been

used I tried to change my position in the boat, but was so cramped by being doubled up for so long that I had great difficulty in moving. I succeeded at last, but the noise caused the Grebe to leave her home, and many minutes elapsed before she again returned. When she did so I took a snapshot of her uncovering her eggs.

All the while that the hen was sitting the male was close at hand, for I could hear his note, resembling the syllables *ker-u-war*, uttered in a harsh, gurgling manner. Never once did he approach near enough for me to take his photograph, although three times he came almost up to the nest.

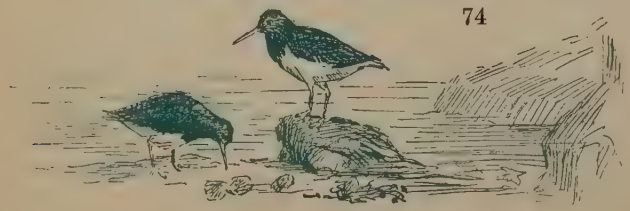
At last I was thoroughly tired, and moving the sack away from my body I sat up. The Grebe seemed terribly startled to see a human being suddenly appear on the scene, rising, as it were, from the water. She went off in such a tremendous hurry with a frightened cry that no attempt was made to cover the eggs, and I noticed that the nest now contained six—two more than on our previous visit. Standing up in the boat I stretched my cramped limbs, packed up the camera, had a meal, and then attempted to move out into the open water.



But so firmly wedged in the reeds was the boat that I had the greatest difficulty in getting it out, and when at last I succeeded I found that there was not much time before the last train left to take me back to Builth Wells. I had an exciting row for over a mile against a strong wind, but luckily the train was over half an hour late, and I caught it.

Not many years ago the birds on this Welsh lake were terribly molested by egg-collectors, but now I am glad to say the boatman who helped me to photograph the Grebe takes a lively interest in the birds, and gives them all the protection in his power. A party of seven students paid a visit to this lake nine years ago, and actually took one hundred and seventy-five eggs of various species ; but all those eggs were taken from them by this zealous boatman, and those students never returned to repeat their practice ; egg-collectors of all kinds will have the same punishment meted out to them if they are discovered disturbing the birds.

When, in the train, I passed away from the lake, the sinking sun had changed the hills from green and grey into a glorious mixture



of sunset crimson and gold. Those opposite were clear, and stood out sharply against the sky, but away to the west the sun was departing, surrounded with a yellow halo, which eventually turned into red and tinted all the hills and valleys alike, as though he were giving them his kindest glances with his last beams, then, fading slowly behind a great sloping moor, the colour went, and all was left grey and cold.

CHAPTER VIII

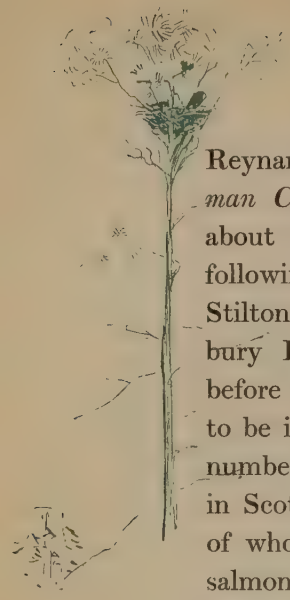
The Kite and the Buzzard

IN some of my other works I have written about that fast-disappearing British bird, the Kite, and I have pictured, with the aid of my camera, several of its nests, but I have not been able heretofore to give illustrations of the bird. It will be seen by my photographs what a really magnificent bird of prey the Kite is, and it seems a thousand pities that it should now be so rare. I have mentioned before that the love of sport of all kinds is inherent in our race, and always will be, but it seems sad that such wild havoc has been wrought by game-preservers and game-keepers amongst our birds of prey. A war of extermination which has been going on for generations past has almost completely wiped out some of the noblest species.

Kite's nest.

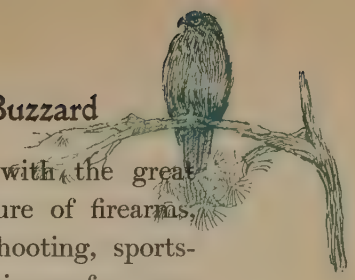
None of these will be missed more than the Kite, or the Common Kite as he is still called, for there was a time when this name was no misnomer. About three hundred years ago, and probably less, the Kite was a common bird in the London streets, and is even protected there to this day, as any one can see who cares to read our Wild Birds Protection Acts. A Bohemian, named Schaschek, who visited these Islands about the year 1541, mentions that he saw more Kites in London, and especially round London Bridge, than he ever saw elsewhere. Amongst other visitors, the French naturalist, Pierre Belon, writing in 1555, mentions that he saw great numbers of these fine birds in London, and he adds that it was illegal to kill them owing to their use as scavengers. There is no doubt that the Kite, which is very fond of carrion, must have been exceedingly useful in the then dirty streets of our towns.

Even at the time of Queen Victoria's accession the Kite was common in this country, although it was not to be met with in the towns, but in the open country it probably nested in most counties. Colonel Birch



Reynardson, in his *Reminiscences of a Gentleman Coachman*, says a few interesting things about birds, and mentions the Kite in the following paragraph: 'Within a few miles of Stilton and Stamford is a hill called Alconbury Hill. About the year 1824 and from before that time to 1828 or 1829 there used to be in that part of the country an incredible number of Kites—the Fork-tailed Kite, or what in Scotland were called Gleeds, the red feathers of whose forked tail were famous for wings of salmon flies. These birds used to be soaring over the road and over a wood called Mark's Wood. In almost every direction, when travelling by the Stamford Regent Coach, one used actually to see them sitting in the middle of the road, and on one occasion I remember counting as many as twenty-seven in the air at the same time. The preservation of game, I suppose, has got rid of them, for no such bird is to be seen now; and it is wonderful how, in a few years, these birds have become almost extinct throughout England. I have not seen one for at least thirty-six years.'

Colonel Reynardson is quite right in supposing that it is the preservation of game that



has got rid of the birds, for with the great advance made in the manufacture of firearms, and the quicker methods of shooting, sportsmen wanted more birds, and their cry for more is still going on, and our birds of prey, and in many instances useful birds too, are being exterminated.

When the old sport of Hawking held sway in this country the Kite was protected, for he afforded the best and grandest of sport, and he even went under the title of the Royal Kite, for sovereigns followed this sport of Hawking. It was considered one of the best and stateliest of flights to set one or two Jerfalcons after a Kite, for with its wonderful powers of flight the Kite soared very high, and then perhaps the two Falcons attacking, all three came to the ground together, and often then the Kite remained the victor and escaped.

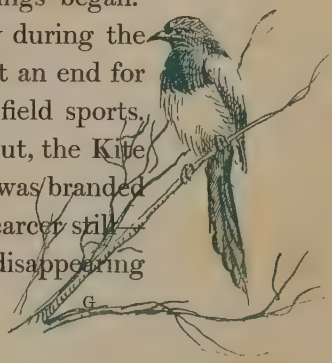
Kings and princes rode out from London to the great open heaths of Royston and Newmarket, there to enjoy this royal sport, and many weeks were spent there in enjoying the excitement of bird hunting bird. King James I., who was an ardent follower of sport, did much to encourage Hawking, and held

many keen competitions with Louis XIII. of France. At this time the King's falconer, Sir Thomas Monson, spent as much as £1,000 before he succeeded in obtaining a pair, or 'cast,' of Hawks that would excel in Kite-hawking the Falcons of Louis XIII. Sir Anthony Weldon, writing of the first flight with this famous cast, says: 'Whereupon the Earle of Pembroke, with all the lords, desired the King but to walk out of Royston towne's end to see that flight, which was one of the most stateliest flights in the world, for the high mountee. The King went willingly forth, the flight was showed, but the Kite went to such a mountee, and the Hawke after her, as all the field lost sight of the Kite and the Hawke, and all, and neither Kite nor Hawke were either seen or heard of to this present, which made all the Court conjecture it a very ill omen.'

In that beautifully illustrated paper, *Country Life*, for December 8, 1906, there was an interesting article on the Kite, and in this we read that 'at times no less than four Jerfalcons were let loose upon a single Kite, and even then they hardly accomplished their task. In great circles the hunters and hunted wheeled round and

round, rising higher and higher, till at last one of the Falcons gained the ascendancy. Then slowly its companions would close in upon the victim, and all five would come to the ground together. Often, it would seem, the Kite was so little injured that it would be released again. At any rate, kind-hearted Louis XIII. often carried such captives home with him and set them free from his palace windows. When a Kite was discovered at a great height soaring in the deep blue of a summer sky, an ingenious device was resorted to to bring him down within reach of the Falcons. This was to fasten the brush of a fox to jesses on the legs of a tame Eagle-Owl, which was then released, trailing the brush behind it as it flew. The Kite, on the look-out for robbery, would at once swoop down, when the Jerfalcon was unhooded and cast off, and the stern battle of wings began.'

The disastrous state of the country during the period of the Civil Wars naturally put an end for a time to Falconry, and indeed all field sports. With this noble sport slowly dying out, the Kite lost his protection, and in later years was branded as an outlaw. Then as he became scarcer still—and this applies to all birds that are disappearing



sportsmen became anxious to have stuffed specimens, and whenever a shot presented itself the gunner took it. Now, at the present day, only about four pairs and perhaps three solitary birds remain to tell the story of the war of extermination that has been levied on this species.

I have no record when the Kite ceased to breed in England, and after exhaustive inquiries I find that the last record of its nesting in Scotland was in 1900. A field naturalist of repute that year examined a young bird in the flesh from central Scotland, and I believe the two parents were trapped and sold to a tourist. Scottish naturalists doubt this record, and they say that the birds were imported from abroad, but what object a gamekeeper would have in going to the expense of importing Kites to sell to innocent tourists I cannot quite understand. If he had only half as much trouble as I had a few years ago, when I tried to get some Kites' eggs from the Continent to place in Buzzards' nests, to endeavour to reintroduce this species, then I can only say that this enterprising keeper would lose heavily over the transaction. I have every reason to know that there *was* a nest

Kite alighting.

Kite at rest.

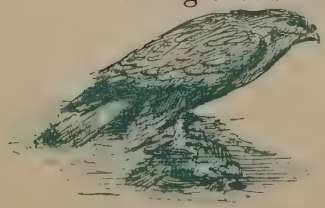
in a certain part of Scotland in 1900 and that three young ones were reared by the parents, and this nest was in one of the bird's ancient strongholds.

At the present day only one or two pairs nest in Wales, and I am glad to say that these are protected by the British Ornithologists' Union, and since this society undertook the protection several pairs have been successful in rearing young. But without the help of the landowners for many miles around the Kites' haunt this protection seems almost futile, for when the young Kites are old enough to care for themselves they wander away from the locality in which they were reared and naturally go where there is plenty of food. This in eight cases out of ten happens to be a grouse moor, or some other large game preserve, and the result is that they are very soon trapped and nailed to the keeper's 'larder.' If every landowner in Wales was to forbid the killing of a Kite on his or her land, then there might be hope for these young birds, but at present I am afraid that there is little chance of the species increasing. When the four or five remaining pairs die it will be too late, for this species will then have become a lost

British bird. If I was a landowner I would rather have one pair of Kites on my land than a thousand brace of Grouse, but unfortunately there are not many who think with me, and for the sake of killing at the most six brace of birds, this magnificent Falcon is trapped. By this I mean that a pair of Kites on a Grouse moor would not in a season account for more than about twelve birds.

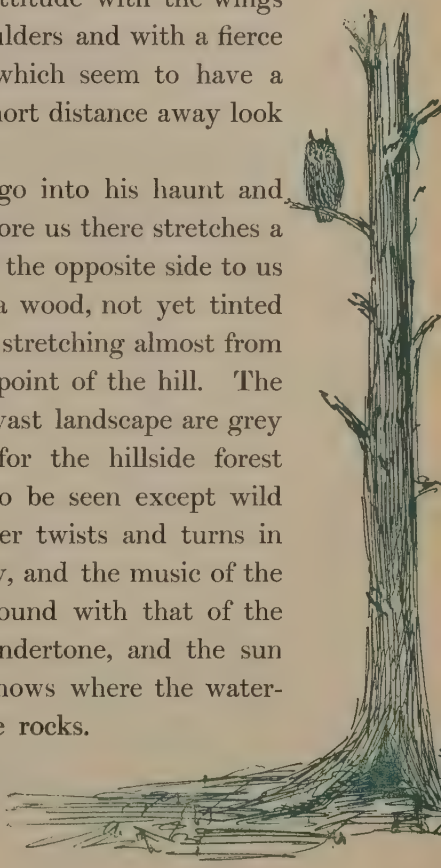
Carrion is the chief food of the Kite, and if a sheep or lamb should sicken and die the Kite will very soon discover it, if it should be anywhere within five or six miles of his haunt. He will seldom touch any but very young game birds, and not then if they are with their parents. He is what may be called 'a snapper up of unconsidered trifles,' and will take small mammals, birds, and reptiles; frogs he is very fond of, and also, on certain occasions, fish. But the Kite is not a voracious species, and it takes a very little to satisfy him.

His flight is remarkably graceful and buoyant, in fact I think it is the perfection of flight, and I have never seen any bird to equal the Kite's beautiful glides and swoops. I have seen him sailing over some of the steep hanging woods on



the mountain-side, and also gliding with wonderful speed through thick woods, and it is really wonderful the turns and twists he will put into his flight by just a slight movement of the tail or wing-tips. When at rest he does not often sit up like a Kestrel or Sparrow Hawk, but remains in a crouching attitude with the wings slightly raised at the shoulders and with a fierce gleam in his pale eyes, which seem to have a greenish tinge, but at a short distance away look white.

Let us for a moment go into his haunt and watch him at home. Before us there stretches a wild, bleak valley, and on the opposite side to us there is a steep hill with a wood, not yet tinted green with spring's touch, stretching almost from the river to the highest point of the hill. The prevailing colours in this vast landscape are grey and brown, and except for the hillside forest there is little vegetation to be seen except wild mountain grass. The river twists and turns in its course down the valley, and the music of the falling water, the only sound with that of the wind, reaches us in an undertone, and the sun lighting up the stream shows where the waterfalls are playing over the rocks.



Skimming across the valley we see a Kite; with open wings he rises and falls and turns, and then comes towards us, and with one magnificent swoop up the hillside, settles on a prominent rock. His eyes seem to be flashing out defiance, as he sits in a crouching attitude, with wings half-lifted, ready to fly at a second's notice. His long tail is spread and is lifted repeatedly as he moves his head from side to side. What a magnificent bird he looks, as he remains there; then, being satisfied that there is no enemy about, he settles down, lowers his tail, but still keeps the wings raised a little, ready to fly, for long years of persecution have taught this species to be ever on the look-out for an attack. One would think that he was conscious that he was almost the last of his species. Even a Carrion Crow flying over some distance away causes the Kite to lift his wings and spread his tail, and turning his head sideways, he looks angrily at the intruder into his haunt; the Crow is watched until out of view and then, with a loud *whew-whew-whew*, the great bird spreads his long pointed wings, leaps up into the blue, and a moment or two later is far away over the distant trees.

I am glad to say that many keepers and

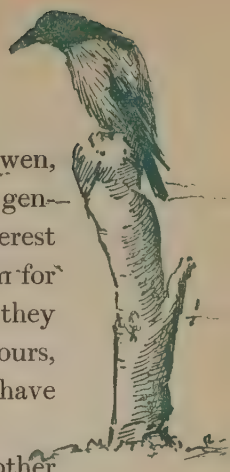
Nests and eggs of the Buzzard.

shepherds in Wales are now taking an interest in the protection of the Kite, and the few bird-lovers who are undertaking this protection are doing their best to fight against the ravages of the egg-collector. But they have a heavier task than many imagine, for some of these men will stoop to the lowest underhand tricks to get possession of the eggs. One season, an individual who was actually supposed to be watching the nests turned out to be one of the most unprincipled persons that ever took to collecting. On the other hand, I know genuine collectors who have often seen the eggs in Kites' nests and have not attempted to take them, knowing that it was unfair to the birds to do so.

When I was on my way to visit one nest with a keeper we met a shepherd, and the latter pleaded with the keeper not to show me the nest. As they were speaking in Welsh I could not understand them, but I could see that the shepherd was very excited. He told the keeper not to trust me, that I came from London, and that the camera was only a ruse to find out the nest, for when the nest had once been shown to me I would return at night and take the eggs. The keeper told the shepherd who I was and

that I was to be trusted, but he replied that he had heard of such people before who had arrived with cameras or fishing-rods, but after being shown the nest had always returned later and robbed it. The poor shepherd was quite crest-fallen when the keeper left him, and I believe that that shepherd still believes that I was one of the most experienced and worst of egg-looters, although the nest I visited eventually contained young, and these left their home and flew away. I am more than delighted that there is such a keen bird-lover to be found in the Kite's haunt, and I only wish there were more like this ardent but mistaken shepherd, for shepherds have better opportunities of watching the birds than many keepers. But shepherds and keepers alike are now taking a real interest in this almost lost species, and if only they can keep the egg-collectors away, and the protectors prevail upon all landowners to protect the bird, then there may be a chance of future generations seeing this bird in its mountain fastness.

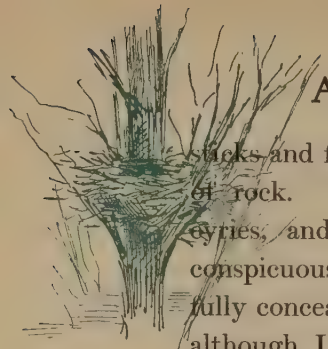
But if it had not been for the interest and energy that three Welsh bird-lovers have put into the cause of protecting nests, the Kite would have been extinct ere this. I refer to



Dr. J. H. Salter, the Rev. D. Edmondes Owen, and Mr. Gwynne-Vaughan. These three gentlemen have for years past taken a great interest in this species, and all honour is due to them for this valuable work. Many, many times they have had disheartening results in their labours, but in the last three seasons their efforts have been crowned with success.

So much for the Kite. The Buzzard, another rare species, and, like the Kite, having the prefix 'common' before its name, to distinguish it from its relative, the Rough-legged Buzzard, will, I am afraid, soon follow in the steps of the former species. In some parts of the country, where only a few years ago it was found nesting, it is now not to be met with, and all owing to the eggs being taken by collectors and dealers' agents. There are, however, a few well-guarded spots where the species thrives, and each season several pairs are successful in rearing young.

The Buzzard sometimes makes an enormous nest, repairing it year after year; and some that I have seen, which have been used for many seasons, are very large structures, while others have been very small indeed—in fact, just a few



sticks and feathers scratched together on a ledge of rock. The Buzzard will often build two eyries, and one of these is often in a very conspicuous situation, while the other is carefully concealed. Four eggs are sometimes laid, although I have never seen more than three. The hen lays one egg and will sit on this for three or four days, and then number two is laid, and so on. The result is that one young Buzzard arrives on the scene two or three days in advance of its brothers or sisters. Young birds always grow rapidly in the first few hours of their life, and the baby Buzzard is no exception to the rule. This voracious youngster, of course, devours all the food that it can get, and when the second Buzzard leaves its shell it has a hard struggle for existence; in fact, the stronger of the youngsters often overpowers the others, and they are starved.

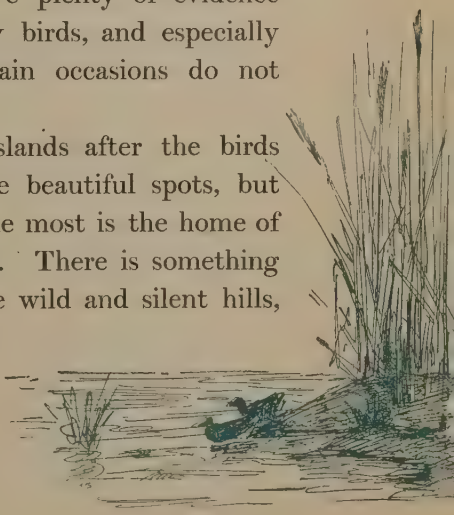
That is what actually happened in the nest here pictured, for the Buzzard that left the shell first grew apace, and prevented the other from taking food when the parents brought this to the eyrie. His plump and well-fed appearance is clearly seen in the photograph, while on the left side of the nest the other young bird is

Young Buzzard with its dead brother by its side.

seen quite dead, and a skinny, starved creature it looked by the side of its lively brother. Then, when these energetic babies have succeeded in killing the other occupants of the nest, they will actually devour their victims. It is a case of the survival of the fittest, and the strongest wins in this keen struggle for life. It is almost as well that they do this, for in some districts the parents would have great difficulty in finding sufficient food for their young. This does not always happen, but I know one district where it is very unusual to see more than one young Buzzard in a nest.

It was, I think, good old Dr. Watts who told us that birds in their little nests agree. I do not think he could have had much experience of wild nature, for I have plenty of evidence to prove that many baby birds, and especially young Buzzards, on certain occasions do not agree.

My travels in these Islands after the birds have taken me into some beautiful spots, but the one that appeals to me most is the home of the Kite and the Buzzard. There is something wonderfully grand in these wild and silent hills,



so far from the sound of human life. One peaceful Sunday evening in early summer I was resting on the summit of a hill, and the view stretched out before me was marvellously great. Below was the little church surrounded with green trees that we had just left, and some of the folk were still coming up the hill on their way home.

The only sounds were the songs of the birds singing their evening anthems to the last rays of the sinking sun, and that sweet, rippling music of water bubbling and tumbling over the stones. Everything was calm—gloriously calm; no clouds covered the pale sky, and the sun, like a great, silent furnace, was almost touching the distant western hills. Away to the north and east the mountain-sides are clothed in a mantle of burnished copper, for the leaves of the whinberry are a peculiar bronze colour, and reflect the sun's rays. Great dark shadows creep slowly up the sides, while here and there in the valleys a tall tree stands out boldly, lit up with the fading light into a pillar of brilliant green, standing out against the meadows of yellow buttercups. Looking down the river we see many still, green pools, and little rivulets

of twinkling water leading to them. The grazing sheep add to the peacefulness of this quiet Sunday evening. A solitary Martin flies past, and presently a loud buzzing beetle follows, rudely breaking the silence; but the sound dies away and twilight falls. The hills have lost their colour, but a long, thin strip of cloud which has slowly risen reflects the sunset purple for a while. Several Rooks, straggling home across the wide valley, at last disappear, and the glory of the day has gone.

The sounds of night come on apace. Owls hoot, Bats fly past, and on the hillside Nightjars are calling. A cold wind blows in from the river, and the departing peace of the day is lost. But as we turn homewards we look back to the west, where the glory of the day has gone, and, turning to the east, know that the next morning will break as fair, and the whole song of a joyful spring, and wonderful summer, will go on and on, and tell its own fair story to those who will only read.

CHAPTER IX

A Norfolk Storm

THE summer wind was playing over the tall reeds, leaving behind it a low whisper which travelled across the marshland and stopped at the group of trees. Again and again a little fitful gust seemed to run up between the lane of rushes, and then, breaking out on to the open broad beyond, rippled the still surface, and made the water twinkle with a merry and smiling face. A group of Bearded Tits, now rare birds, 'dropped' across from one reed-clump to another, and giving out their musical note, like striking two large coins together, disappeared in single file across the broad. These young birds had not long left their home, and even now there were five young cosily huddled together in their nest, made of the flower of the reed, which was

Mute swan sitting. Bearded Tit's nest.

snugly concealed in a thick clump of these reeds surrounded by deep water.

Beyond the trees stretched some green meadows, and cows were grazing there; cornfields, yellow with the approach of August, were spread out like a carpet of gold between the two revolving windmills, and flocks of birds continually passed, flying low towards the waving corn. Clouds in the west were gathering fast, and as evening approached the whole sky was covered with drifting masses of vapour torn by the wind above into fantastic shapes. And as we went towards our boat a Wild Duck was seen crouching in the shelter of the reeds; on her back was a duckling, and four more sat by her side, while one little brown head with a twinkling black eye peeped from underneath its mother's wings.

The cows had all gathered up into one corner of the meadow. Out on the broad Coots were calling noisily, and Moorhens left the reeds and flew to the open water. The sun, now low in the west, looked like a great star, throwing out beams of copper and gold over the wide, flat landscape. The large sails of the Norfolk wherries—a boat which, I believe, is peculiar

to this county—were tinted with this bright lustre. The more distant trees were almost lost in a blue mist, which blends so well with the green beneath and the paler blue and gold above. The wind almost drops, and the large sails hang limp and lifeless as the heavy boats are quanted past, and the only sound is the wash of the ripples against the sides.

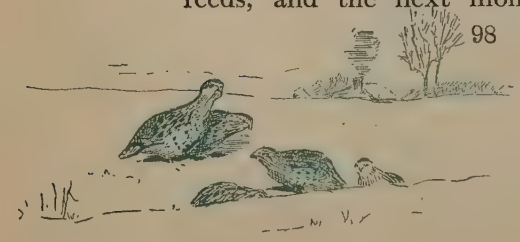
But in the pale purple of the departing sun a Lark is seen to rise, and as he goes up, pouring out those notes so full of love and all that is beautiful in the country, his wings are lit with the prevailing light 'like a cloud of fire,' and as he wings his way skywards he still pours out his song. Before he descends the whole landscape is changed, as it were, by a single touch. The wind that has been driving the clouds seems to descend. The still water is roused into life, the big, black sails catch the breeze, and the boats bend over in answer. The dark clouds become blacker, and their margins a deeper and brighter gold. The tall reeds bend to the wind, which every moment increases in power; it whistles through them, and the wavelets driven in also make a continual wash, wash, wash! Every second the

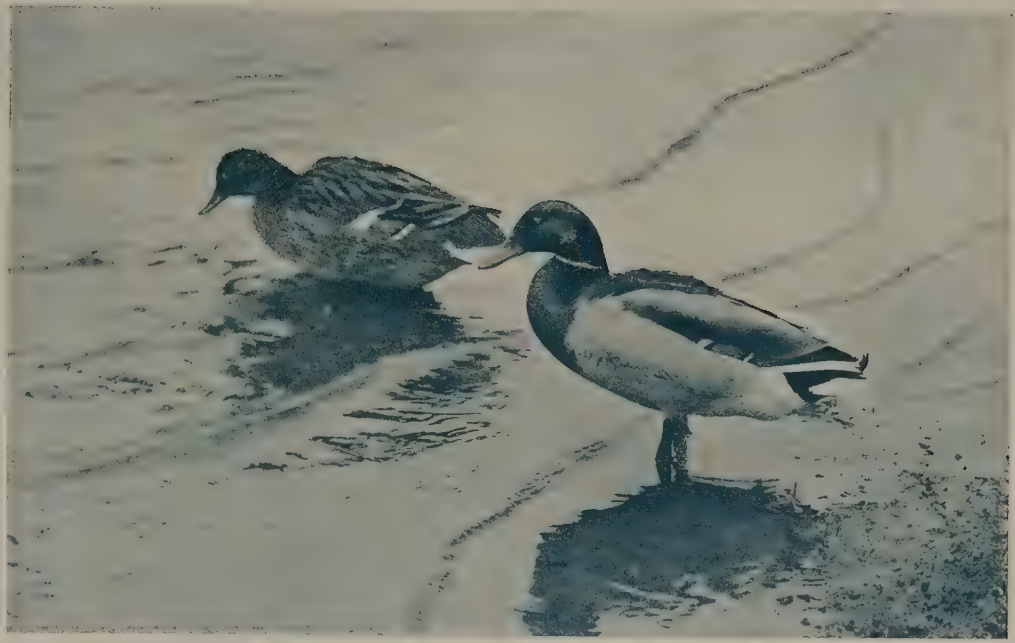
wonderful clouds change their forms and colour, and every second the fitful hot wind changes the wavelets into waves, reeds bend over more and more, and the whisper becomes a wild, rushing sound. The notes of the little bird above are drowned in the voice of the approaching storm, and a swirl of wings is heard as a straggling flock of Starlings fly hurriedly past.

The grandest scene of all in this touch of wild nature is the clouds, and although I have seen some marvellous sunsets in my travels, I have never seen anything to approach that picture of wild wind-torn vapour that each moment changed its form and colour. Then as I watched, the coppery sun went down beyond the water, and instantaneously a great burst of golden glory spread over the entire sky. Yellow, purple blue and green, rich red and deep crimson, and a long, red lane stretches from our boat to the sunken sun. In the south there is a gigantic cumulus cloud, lit up with the sunset glow as it stands out like a great snowy mountain against a range of black hills. A solitary Swift flies up and battles against the wind. Flashes of lightning ever and again leap

out of the darkening vapour. The reeds are now bending down to the powerful wind; the big cloud changes into a smoky yellow, and looks terrible in its grandeur; dividing the east from the west is a long strip of yellow mackerel sky, like a wide hand dividing two approaching armies, one grand in its beauty, majestic with the colours of a departed sun, and the other full of ugly fury, and wind-torn, black, straggling clouds. More dark grey cumulus clouds roll up and disappear again, and then the yellow giant in the south sinks, like a mountain swallowed up into an enormous smoky depth. Another wild thunder-cloud comes up in its place, the colours of the evening glow, and go as quickly as they came. The birds are frightened; Ducks fly to the reeds, and other feathered inhabitants of Broadland seek shelter.

Looking up I see a mad, rushing, tumultuous black sky, and the colours, that only a moment before were so wonderful, are now gone. It is as though I had looked for a moment at a marvellous painting and suddenly it had been covered by a black curtain. Two Coots with frightened calls fly into the whistling reeds, and the next moment the rain pours





The ebbing tide. Wild Ducks feeding.

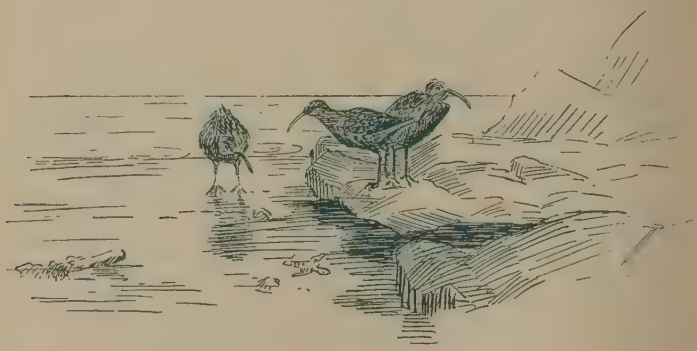
On the left is a duck, on the right a drake.

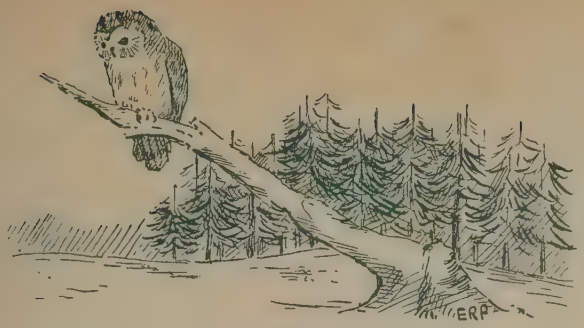
down, the lightning flashes, the thunder roars out over the flat expanse of country, and echoes and re-echoes across the water; streams of rain pouring down hiss into the rivers, and tear their way through the rushes. Crash follows crash, and every other second the drenched landscape is lit up with a ghostly purple hue. The storm's fury drowns all other sounds: no notes of birds are heard, for all are hiding.

And again and again, as we look up, grand and terrible shapes are seen, huge masses of yellow clouds, one rolling up behind the other, and between them flashes of fire bubbling and bursting, and then the echoing peals of Nature's loudest voices, and the tearing and rending of the wind and rain between. The feathered inhabitants of the broads remain hidden while the storm passes across the sky, and when a star shows itself in the dark vault above they come out one by one and have a royal feast in the disturbed waters.

The next morning broke bright and fair, and there was nothing to tell that only a few hours before the wild forces of Nature had been let loose, save a long bank of yellow

cumulus clouds, low down on the southern horizon, and soon these were lost in the haze of the lengthening day. Over in the reeds I hear a noise—only the note of a bird—and looking there, the Wild Duck is leading her young out into the sunshine, and as they all merrily go past, the mother with one baby still on her back, which balances its plump little body as she swims forward, I think of the storm that has just passed, and of those six innocent birds that all through the downpour, flashing, and crashing, nestled peacefully under the shelter of their mother's warm wings.





CHAPTER X

Owls

ONE of the most interesting families of birds in our British list is the Owls, but owing to their nocturnal habits they are hard to observe and difficult to photograph. From time to time, however, during my Bird-land wanderings I have been fortunate to come across these birds on bright moonlight nights, or in the long twilight of summer evenings, and it has been possible to watch them closely.

I have often been struck with the care and regularity with which the White and Brown Owls will quarter a meadow, or hedgerow, and very little, I believe, escapes their keen eyes or ears. The Tawny or Brown Owl will begin foraging as soon as the sun has set. During the day he sits on a branch of a thickly-leaved tree, but as soon as the birds of day begin to

cease their songs, he opens his big eyes, stretches his wings and legs, and for a time sits and looks around. Sometimes a noisy Blackbird will spot him, and then, with angry calls, the smaller bird will arouse half the wood, and Thrushes, Finches, Starlings, and Warblers will all crowd around and hold a noisy council of war; but the large, sober-looking Owl will just sit and blink until he feels inclined to move. At last his wings are opened, and he silently swoops from his perch and glides away. The birds around hurriedly get out of his path, for while the Owl is motionless they are bold, but as soon as he moves away they flee in terror.

However, unity is strength, and for a few minutes the chattering Blackbirds follow and drive the big brown enemy from their midst.

When free from the wood the Owl makes for the open meadow, and flies low over the hedges, for he knows that it is there he will find the mice and voles. His large, soft wings are beaten slowly until he wants to stop and examine a certain patch, then he remains almost motionless with the exception of the tips of the pinions, and if a mouse should show itself

Young Tawny Owl.

'Sober as a judge.'

Little Owl.

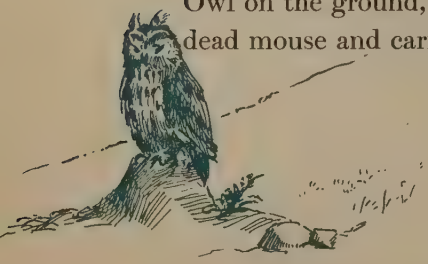
'A sharp, cute bird.'

the Owl will just drop on to the ground and seldom misses his prey.

My home is covered with thick ivy, and in this numbers of Sparrows roost. I have often seen a Brown Owl quartering this ivy. Although the bird has sometimes been just above my head, I have never heard any noise made by his wings. You just see him, like a silent ghost, passing over the ivy. It gives some idea of the power of an Owl's eyes, to penetrate into the dark shadows amongst the thick leaves as they do, and on several occasions I have seen these birds practically throw themselves into the ivy and always they have succeeded in bringing out a sleeping sparrow. And how the latter scream! why, sometimes the noise sounded like the cry of a child in pain. It must certainly be a terrible experience to be hauled out of bed, as it were, by four or eight enormous claws; my feelings and sympathy have always been with the captured bird. But it is necessary that Sparrows should be kept within bounds, and my friends the Owls take good care that the Sparrows in this district do not increase to such an extent as to become a nuisance to the farmer or market gardener.

It is in those localities where the farmers make it a rule to shoot all Hawks and Owls that the Sparrow increases; and yet they have only themselves to blame. I cannot imagine a more short-sighted policy than that of the farmer who shoots or traps an Owl; yet there are hundreds who still do so, and yet at other times employ men to capture moles, rats, and mice. One pair of Owls and Kestrels will destroy more rodents and Sparrows in one year than fifty well-kept traps, but for some unaccountable reason the Owls and small Hawks are still destroyed, and often adorn one of the farmer's rooms, set up in an impossible attitude in a glass case.

That remarkable-looking bird, the White or Barn Owl, is often to be seen in the stubble after the corn has been cut. Sometimes he will sit motionless on one of the sheaves, and carefully look around. When a mouse or vole, which always abound in such places, shows itself, the white bird will leave its perch and dash down upon the small animal. We hear a loud squeak, and, watching the struggling Owl on the ground, we see him pick up the now dead mouse and carry it in his beak to a tree.



Barn Owl.

The sentinel of the belfry tower.

Owls

Once I was fortunate to have an Owl sit just over my head on an open branch, and from his beak a little bunch of fur was dangling. He looked around with his big, bright eyes, and then took the mouse in one foot, and taking a firm foothold, with the rodent underneath, he began to pull it to pieces with his sharp beak. He seemed to be enjoying his hard-earned meal, for every portion of the large mouse or vole was eaten, and when he came to devouring the fur he almost overbalanced himself while holding the skin under one foot, and pulling with the beak; for now and then it would yield suddenly, and he would slip backwards and open his big wings to regain his balance.

We had a pair of White Owls nesting in this district for years—in fact, as long as I remember these birds had reared a family in a certain barn. But the place changing hands, the two parents were slaughtered, with their young, and the whole family are now to be seen in a glass case, where they might be labelled 'The Last of the Barn Owls'; for since then not a single specimen has been seen in the district, and now that so much land is being covered with

buildings, I am afraid no more will attempt to haunt the neighbourhood again.[1]

There is often a nest in a certain churchyard in North London, and when the nest contains large youngsters, the most weird and unearthly noises are to be heard. No wonder that the ignorant imagine the place to be haunted, and I confess that I should have thought the same unless I had known that the noises proceeded from my friends the Owls.

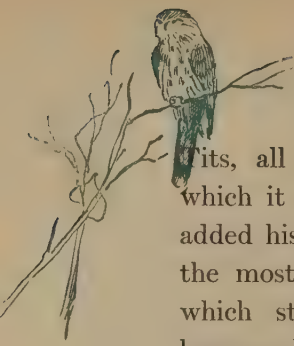
The Brown Owl also has been responsible for many frights administered to late travellers. It is certainly a nerve-trying experience to be walking home alone in the cold, small hours of the morning, and when passing through a gate leading on to a long, lonely pathway, to hear a loud *whoo-hoo-e-hoo* just above your head, and, looking up, to see nothing but a misty form disappearing across the meadow.

But I think the worst thing of all is to listen to a young Tawny Owl endeavouring to 'sing' or tune its voice, for even the experienced naturalist will sometimes be baffled by the remarkable noises these ambitious youngsters make.

[1] Since the above was written, in 1906, I am glad to say that the White Owls have returned, and are again nesting in this district.

One summer night a young Brown Owl perched itself just outside a bedroom window and then began its practice. It went slowly at first, but as it grew bolder the curious noises developed into the most blood-curdling hoots and groans, and then died away again into weird, unearthly moans. The two sleepers in the room were quite scared, and I was called in to listen to the 'tragedy' that was taking place in the road. At first I was somewhat scared too, but soon recognised the noises as proceeding from an Owl, and there he was, on a branch just outside the window, his head moving from side to side and his throat swelling as he proudly tried to imitate his parents, which were no doubt not far away.

When staying with my friend the Rev. D. Edmondes Owen, at the charming rectory of Llanelwedd, on the banks of that lovely river the Wye, we had great fun by placing a stuffed Brown Owl in a prominent place in the garden. A very few minutes later a Blackbird saw this bird, and with loud, angry notes hopped round. Instantly all the birds in the garden seemed to know that an enemy was present, for Sparrows, Thrushes, Chaffinches, Starlings, and



Tits, all flew and hopped round the tree in which it was placed. Once a Rook came and added his loud notes to the angry chorus. But the most amusing of all was a Tree-Creeper, which started ascending the tree, from the base, and then, waiting until it reached the Owl, just gave a glance at it, then flew down again. Then up it went as before until near the Owl, again popped its head round the corner to see if the Owl was still there, and many times it repeated this funny exercise, and each time it seemed to be more surprised at the big brown bird sitting so silently on the branch.

The Short-eared Owl, unlike the two preceding species, is fond of searching for its food in the hours of day, and it will sometimes be flushed from its hiding-place when walking over country suited to its habits. The meadows of Norfolk and the extensive open moors of Scotland are favourite haunts, but it is at all times a rare bird, and seldom met with. The one in my illustration is eating a good-sized rat; it has already devoured the head—a thing which most birds of prey do first—and it was just proceeding to eat the body when the click of my

Short-eared Owl with its prey—a large common Rat.

It will be noticed that the head has already been devoured.

camera shutter caused it to look up, and it remained perfectly still for ten seconds while I made the exposure. It is very useful to have a shutter on a bird camera which will make a click when it opens, for many restless birds will sometimes keep quite motionless when they hear it. Of course it does not always work successfully, but for birds on their nests it is very useful, and many of my most successful pictures have been taken in this way.

The Little Owl is perhaps less known than the Short-eared. It is a delightful species, and few people have any idea that there is such a small Owl in these Islands. In length it is only about nine inches. This Owl has been introduced in large numbers from the Continent. As long ago as 1843 Waterton liberated five of these birds near Wakefield, and since that time many other naturalists have done a similar thing, and now it seems well established in certain parts of this country. It is so small and so quick in its actions that it has probably been very much overlooked.

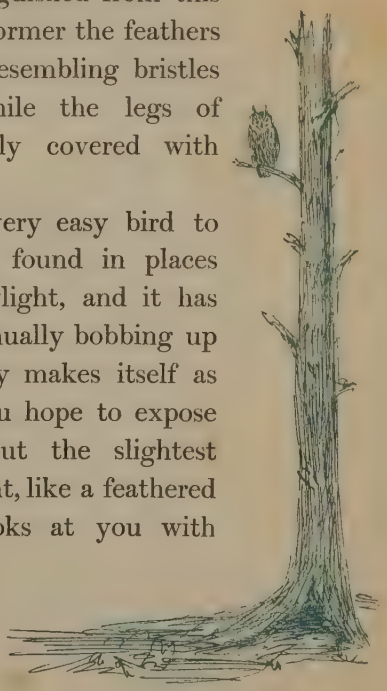
Indeed, the energetic and go-ahead young naturalists of the present day are discovering facts which the old naturalists, with their stereo-

typed methods of observation, never dreamed of. When I was scarcely out of my teens I discovered two new facts in regard to the nesting habits of the Moorhen and the habits of the Water-vole, and both these, which have been described in previous works, although simple everyday habits of the creatures, had escaped the notice of all naturalists who had preceded me. There is much to be found out about our common birds, and a deal more about the rarer breeding species, and it is the younger generation of field naturalists who are discovering new facts.

It will no doubt surprise many readers to know that there is an Owl not much larger than a Sparrow. This unfortunately is not a British species, but it is certainly a very charming and interesting bird. The majority of people always look on Owls as large, fierce creatures, but there is another bird about the size of the Little Owl, which is also found in these Islands, called Tengmalm's Owl. Not very many specimens have been taken in this country ; from the beginning of the last century to 1898 only about twenty examples were recorded, but since then there have been other

Tengmalm's Owl.

records. These birds are natives of northern forest regions, and in severe weather they migrate southwards, and that accounts for the few specimens which have been seen. But in my opinion we can seldom judge of the rarity of a bird by the numbers which have been shot, for with a species like Tengmalm's Owl, for every bird captured there are probably twenty which are never seen. This Owl, like the Short-eared, searches for food in bright sunlight, and feeds on mice, beetles, and small birds. The Little Owl can easily be distinguished from this species by the legs. In the former the feathers on the legs are short, more resembling bristles as the toes are reached, while the legs of Tengmalm's Owl are thickly covered with feathers.



The Little Owl is not a very easy bird to photograph, for it is usually found in places where there is not much daylight, and it has an exasperating habit of continually bobbing up and down. The bird suddenly makes itself as short as it can, and just as you hope to expose your plate, it quickly, without the slightest warning, jumps to its full height, like a feathered Jack-in-the-box, and then looks at you with

its bright, wide-open eyes. You hope that it will remain like that for a second or two, and hesitate before releasing the shutter, but the instant the lens is uncovered that aggravating bird bobs down again, and another plate is spoilt. The photographer begins to despair, for after each futile exposure the Owl shoots bolt upright, and with a speaking expression in its bright eyes seems to mock you with the words, 'There, "done" you again; have another try!' Patience, however, always wins with wild animals, and at last a satisfactory exposure is made.

The Long-eared Owl, to my mind the most beautiful of our English Owls, also has this habit of bobbing up and down, but in a lesser degree than the smaller species just described. In my illustration, which I have entitled 'Night,' the bird is seen sitting on a branch in the dark woods on the look-out for prey. It is a very amusing sitter to try to photograph, for if you can approach near enough for this, it will stare wonderingly at you with its large, round eyes, which are a rich orange in colour, and then it slowly winks at you with one, while the other is kept wide open. When the

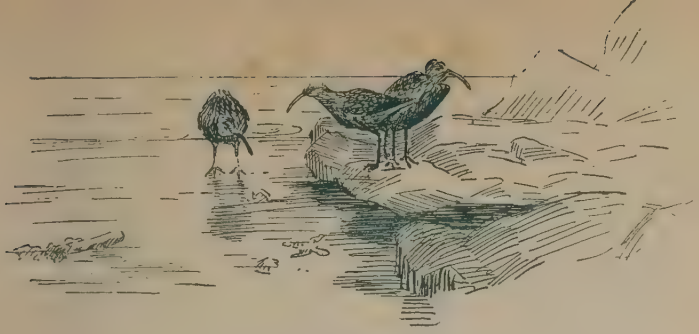
Long-eared Owl

closed eye is sufficiently rested, it is slowly opened and another slow wink is given with the other, and so on; in fact, all the time I was photographing this bird it kept up a continual see-saw blinking with its eyes, and was very comical to watch.

The Long-eared Owl is nocturnal in its habits and is seldom observed, for it is a very silent species. The note is sometimes a short and not very loud whistle, and by snapping the beak a noise has been produced which has been likened to a quack. The hen lays her eggs on a squirrel's old drey, or in the former and now unused nest of a Crow, Magpie, Sparrow Hawk or Rook. The bird will often line the nest sparingly with a few fine sticks or fur from the rabbit. Like the Tawny Owl, it will sometimes occupy a hole in the ground, such as a rabbit burrow.

The Long-eared Owl is a keen hunter and destroys hundreds of mice; in fact, it is one of the most useful friends the farmer could possibly have. Just after sunset the bird will often be seen carefully quartering the sides of hedgerows bordering on pine or larch forests, for it seldom wanders very far from its nesting

haunt. It has a remarkably silent flight and is very quick in its actions. If a mouse only so much as shows its tail while the bird is searching, the latter will instantly throw itself into the grass, and we nearly always hear a short, sharp squeak, which tells us that this night-hunter has not missed its prey.



CHAPTER XI

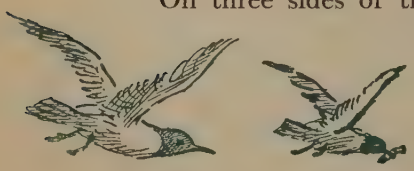
Some Adventures in the Sea-birds' Haunt

TO one who has spent most of his life far inland, away from the sea, there is something wonderfully fascinating in a holiday spent within sound of the breaking waves, and once at least each nesting season I try to get away from the fields, orchards, and woods, and travel to one of the famous haunts of sea-birds. Many of these species lay their eggs in June, and this circumstance gives the Nature photographer or naturalist time to study the habits of the inland birds, and when these have almost finished nesting the others are beginning. I consider that the bird-photographer may begin to search for nests in February, and not finish his work until August has arrived, thus having almost six full months in which to work.

If there is one thing more than another that

I look forward to it is a week or more spent in the haunt of the Gannet, Kittiwake, Tern, and other species which make their home on the rocks which are ceaselessly washed by the rising and falling sea. But a holiday spent in the company of the Sea-gull is very different from a seaside holiday, as many understand it. There are no fine hotels, or grand promenades on which to march up and down and show your fine clothes; there are no band-stands either. The only music is the sound of the waves on the broken, rock-bound shore, and the only promenade is usually a rough grass-covered walk at the top of high cliffs; and sometimes there is not even this, but just jagged stones and big boulders on which to tear your garments and wear away your boots. And the only lodging is often a broken-down hut, a deserted ruin, or a tent. But although we have had to rough it, the memories of days and nights spent in such haunts are some of the dearest that we cherish, when we look back on our travels in Bird-land.

In the Firth of Forth there stands an isolated rock, about two miles from the nearest shore. On three sides of this island the cliffs rise for



Gannet.

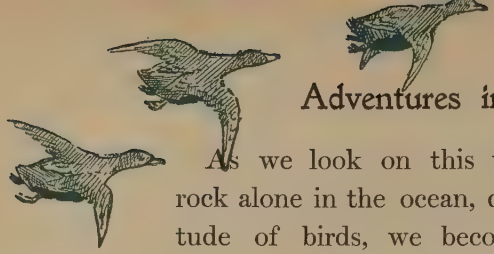
nearly three hundred feet straight from the sea, and almost every available ledge and cranny in that great circular wall is taken possession of by a sea-bird of some description. On all the larger shelves of rocks there are Gannets, while the smaller places are taken possession of by hosts of Guillemots which sit in rows, like small armies of soldiers in white and black uniforms. Kittiwakes, too, are dotted about in hundreds, and a piece of jutting rock, even smaller than that occupied by solitary Guillemots, suffices for a platform on which to build their nests. Shags, Puffins, and Eider Ducks are seen swimming on the sea, and numerous Herring Gulls and Lesser Black-backed Gulls are flying around. Razorbills are sitting near the Guillemots, and on the higher portions of the rock itself several species of smaller birds are found. A Pied Wagtail's nest is discovered, and Rock Pipits and Meadow Pipits are heard singing; altogether on this rock there is a vast, numberless army of birds.

The Bass Rock is one of the most marvellous bird sights in this country, and every one who has the opportunity should certainly visit it. At a rough estimate there are at least thirty

thousand pairs of Gannets alone, and it is impossible to imagine or describe what a wonderful bird sight this is. We will imagine that we are passing slowly round the island in a small boat. There is only one landing-place on the whole rock, and we leave this on our left and row to the east side. Directly the boat passes a little promontory of rock we enter a cave with enormous jagged wave-washed boulders hanging from the roof, looking as though they might drop down and bury the craft with its occupants. This cave is supposed to penetrate right through to the opposite side, and when a wave comes in and breaks on the rocks the noise echoes and re-echoes through this long tunnel. One or two Shags have their nests at the entrance, while up in the roof there are rows upon rows of Guillemots, who stand and look wonderingly at the strange visitors down below. Leaving the boat, we climb up the sides of the dark cave and get level with some of the Guillemots, and as they leave we can see many of their beautiful eggs lying on the bare shelves.

Leaving the cave, we row out, and after going a few yards we come in full view of the birds;

they see us too, and with loud, discordant calls thousands of them leave the cliff and circle out to sea. Rowing in close to the rock, we look up, and it is the nearest approach to fairyland I have seen. All around our boat and high up above us there are thousands of great birds sailing. One moment the bright sun lights up the white breasts, and the next the backs of the Solan Geese gleam in the rays, as they circle round and round and up and down. As we slowly pass along there is a deafening chorus of bird-calls. Five thousand Gannets give out their harsh cry, hundreds of Kittiwakes answer with their shrill notes, and then a few minutes later there is silence. Now, indeed, it looks more like a fairy scene than anything I have ever looked upon—no sound except that of the waves beating against the rock and washing under the bow of the boat, but white wings are everywhere, all circling dreamingly around, crossing and re-crossing one another in a wonderful mixed maze. Some are flapping their long pinions, while the majority are simply swooping up and down with outstretched wings. One would imagine that there were at least ten thousand wings around us, while out on the water there are as many more.



As we look on this wild scene, this great rock alone in the ocean, covered with its multitude of birds, we become fascinated by the novelty of the scene, and while we rest on our oars the boat drifts whither it will, while we gaze wonderingly upwards. A Kittiwake high up the bird-covered sides gives out his shrill note on catching sight of the small craft below, a hundred of his species reply, and every Gannet within hearing answers with his louder and harsher call. What a moment before was a silent scene is now one tumultuous chorus.

Let us leave the sea, and land on the island, making our way up a steep, winding path, which in places is on the very brink of the precipice; this leads to the summit of the rock; and then by choosing our way carefully we are able to descend one of the sides, and in a few minutes we find ourselves right amongst the birds. The view from above is almost as marvellous as that from the sea, for as we traverse the narrow ledges, in places no wider than our boots, and look down, we see thousands of birds sitting on their nests and flying around. Down on the water, which looks a beautiful green from this height—the higher we are above the sea

Gannets flying. Gannets at home.

the more brilliant the water always seems—there are numberless dots stretching away for miles. These are Gannets resting on the water, and with them there are hundreds of other species.

The heat of the sun is causing a mist to rise on the sea, and the small waves are dying down to mere ripples, which look like a million tiny stars when the sunbeams kiss them. The rocks on the distant shore are dark grey, almost lost in the gathering mist, while Tantallon's stately ruins can just be distinguished over the little sandy bay. There is a great moving host of birds below us, seeming to be going to and from the rock with a slow flight, but in reality they are moving very fast indeed. Some of the Solan Geese nearest us dive off the rock, and, opening their wings, swoop in a great slanting curve for half a mile without a movement of their feathers. What a glorious dive this must be, and what a perfect exercise of flight at its best! The sound of some of the birds entering the water with a loud splash is distinctly heard, and many other sounds reach us clearly.

The foghorns of steamers passing along the Firth and the throbbing of their machinery are distinctly audible long before the boats

themselves are in view. On the sea itself there seem to be long pathways of darker water, stretching away as far as the eye can penetrate, and when a flock of birds swim into one of these curious lanes they do not seem to disturb in any way the dividing line.

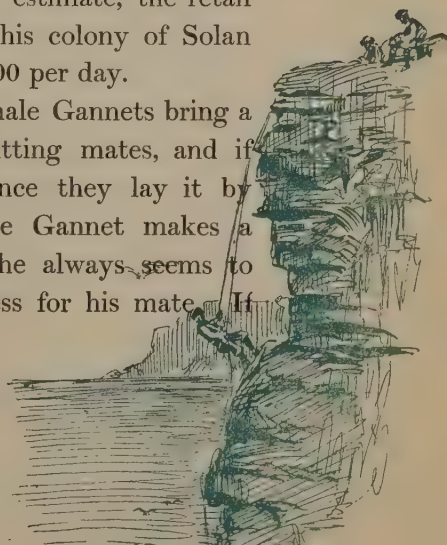
It is not the easiest work to obtain successful photographs of these Gannets, or Solan Geese. If we actually climb down amongst the birds we must have strong nerves—or perhaps it is better still to have no nerves at all—and a sure foot. Then I think the photographer is safe. A false step in certain places would mean a fearful fall into the sea two hundred or more feet below, and one has to keep all one's wits at work, while clinging on with one hand to the rocks and holding a camera in the other. Some of the pictures illustrating this chapter were only obtained by the photographer literally balancing himself on the brink of a fearful precipice, while both hands were manipulating the camera. I may say, in passing, that there is no camera in the world, with the exception of that successful instrument known as the 'Bird-land' camera, that could have produced some of these photographs. With an ordinary reflex camera, or any other

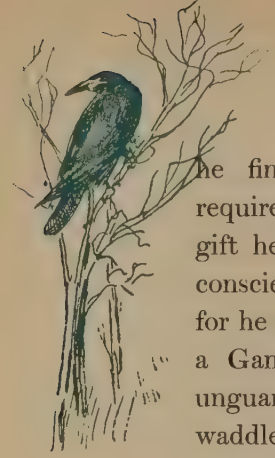
Gannets and their single egg.

make of hand camera, it would have been quite impossible to focus the Gannets, while stalking along these treacherous shelves of rock, and this camera, which was introduced only four years ago, is now used by nearly all the chief Nature photographers in all parts of the world.

Some of the Gannets are capturing fish; they fly slowly over the water at a height of one hundred feet or more, and when they see a fish they close their wings and dive like a great white dart dropping from the skies, and enter the water with a mighty splash that can be heard for half a mile. They must sometimes go under for a great distance, for if we watch the sea carefully they seem a long time in coming up again. They feed principally on herrings, and, at a very low estimate, the retail price of fish consumed by this colony of Solan Geese amounts to over £1,000 per day.

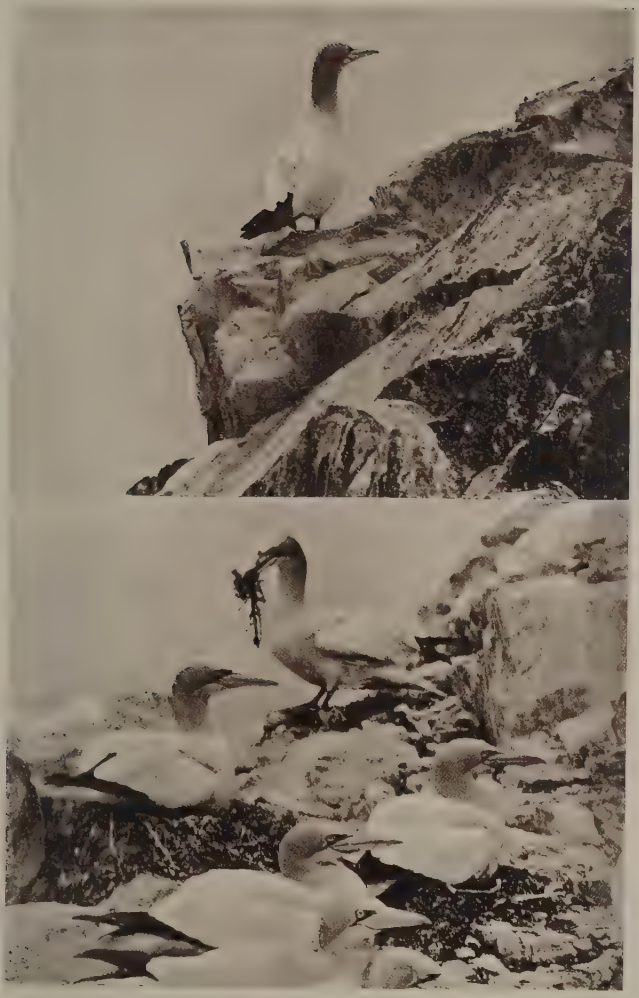
We notice numbers of male Gannets bring a large silvery fish to their sitting mates, and if she does not take it at once they lay it by the side of the nest. The Gannet makes a very dutiful husband, and he always seems to be doing some little kindness for his mate. If





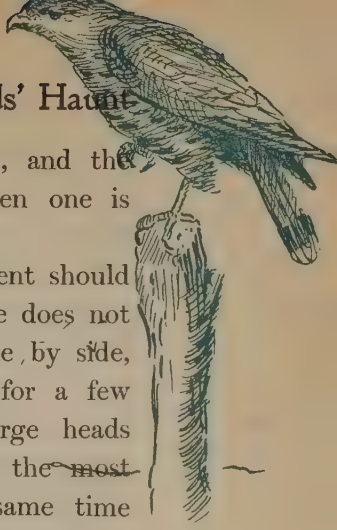
he finds that his wife has all the food she requires, then he sallies forth to see what other gift he can find her. I regret to say that his conscience, if he has any, does not prick him, for he is a most unprincipled thief. Sometimes a Gannet is foolish enough to leave her nest unguarded, and then this bold plunderer will waddle up to it, and with his big beak he quietly confiscates all he can possibly pull off. Then triumphantly he goes back to his sitting mate and gives her this love-gift. With many happy chucklings, which sound like the guttural laughter of a fat old man, she takes the seaweed and proudly looks up at her lord and master. He, appreciating these thanks, turns round and goes off in search of more.

But probably by this time the owner of the robbed nest has returned, and then a battle ensues—not a good old-fashioned scuffle like that practised by our farmyard cockerels, for these as a rule have one good set-to, and then the victor stands on the vanquished one's chest and crows lustily. The Gannet fights in a very different manner, for when on land he is a helpless, ungainly bird, and sitting down in front of his enemy, he holds his beak and



Gannet on the brink of a precipice.

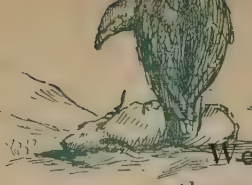
Male Gannet presenting his mate with materials stolen from another nest.



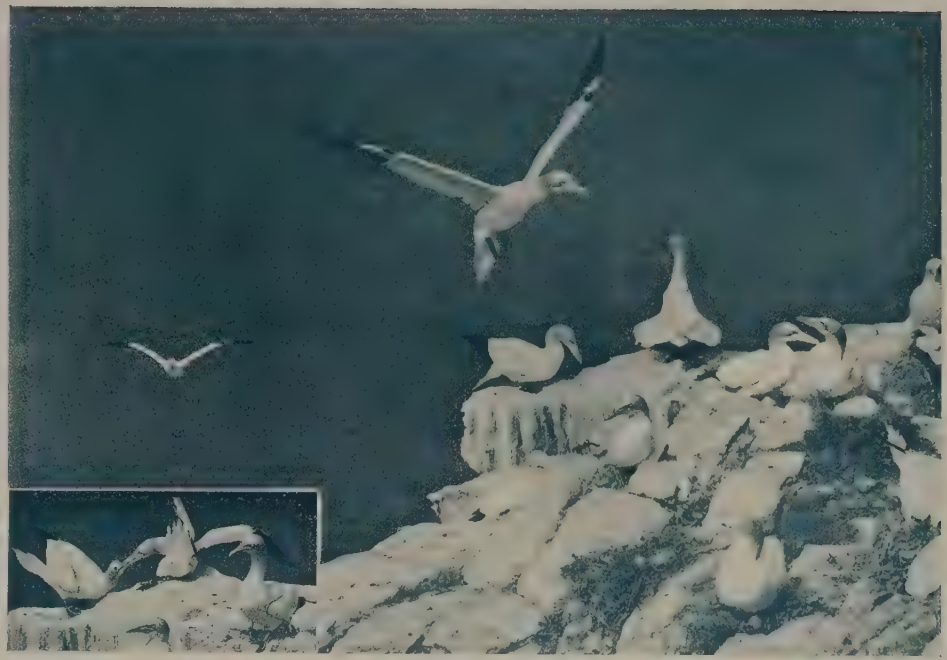
then pulls, twists, tugs and pushes, and the other bird does the same, and when one is tired he gives in.

If the Gannet who is on plunder bent should return to his mate without a gift she does not seem to mind, for, sitting down side by side, they look lovingly at one another for a few moments, then they rub their large heads together, and certainly look two of the most stupid and ridiculous, but at the same time most affectionate, birds it would be possible to find during a day's tramp through Bird-land.

I was crouching up in the corner of a ledge, and while waiting with my camera ready for an exposure at a moment's notice, I saw a male Gannet bringing his mate a wedding present, in the form of a big bunch of black seaweed, and just in the nick of time I released the spring of my shutter and secured the photograph which accompanies this chapter. Before I could change my plate the hen had taken the gift, otherwise it would have made an interesting picture if I could have photographed her in the act of receiving this. However, I thought myself very fortunate to take the picture as it was.



We saw many amusing incidents during the three days we spent on this Rock. The visit was all too short, and the best part of the day, from sunrise to sunset, was spent amongst the birds. One old Gannet had evidently settled on the wrong nest, and she might certainly be excused for doing this, for with thousands of nests around it must be very difficult to remember which is which. Unless birds are gifted with very wonderful powers of observation and memory it would be impossible for them always to find their own eggs, and I have on more than one occasion actually known birds lose their own eggs or nests, and lay another clutch elsewhere. But this particular Gannet, like an absent-minded lodger entering his wrong apartments, had made herself very comfortable on the nest of seaweed. Then the owner appeared on the scene, and seeing a large intruder on her home, endeavoured by gentle persuasion to induce her to leave. The intruder refused to do so; then the rightful owner, taking the sitting bird by its beak, tried to pull it off, but the latter refused to be persuaded either by words or force. After a tussle lasting a few minutes the owner's mate arrived on



Gannets fighting.

Clearly showing their method of holding beaks.

The fighters separated by the arrival of a third party.

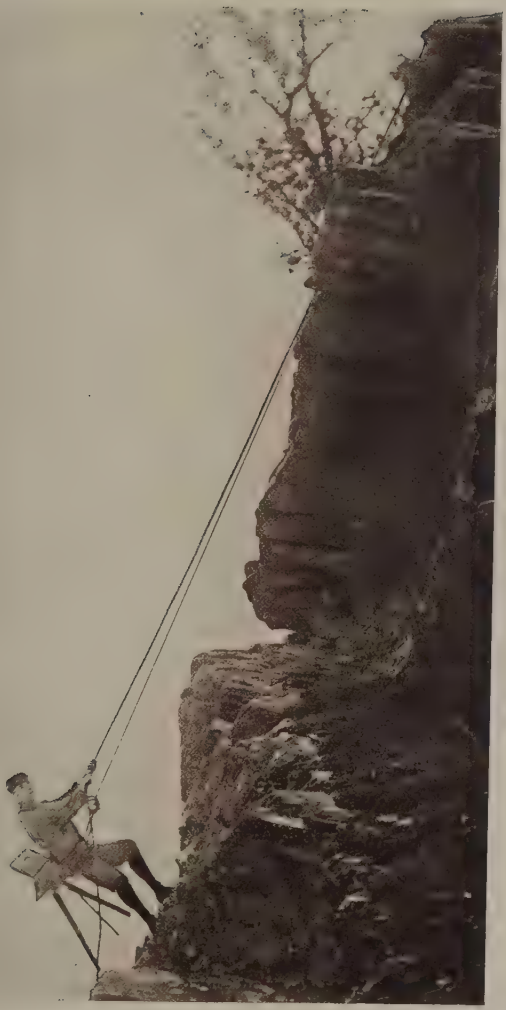
Note how the bird on the right is hurriedly shuffling away.

the scene. He was a cute old Gannet; he had evidently seen such family quarrels before, and taking in the whole situation at a glance, in a business-like way he marched soberly round to the other end of the enemy. He saw that his wife had hold of the stranger's head, and therefore there was only one thing for him to do. With his big beak he took a firm grasp of the bird's tail; mother pulled in one direction while father pulled in the other, and of course something had to give way under this tremendous strain. The Gannet in the middle was at last induced to leave, and waddling dejectedly to the edge of the cliffs, she opened her big wings and flew away.

Although the Gannet has such great powers of flight it is unable to rise from a level surface. We captured one of the birds, and it was carried down to the large, open, flat space in front of the lighthouse to see if it could possibly rise. It made the most strenuous efforts, but only flapped helplessly about, and not until it reached a breach in the wall and scrambled through into space was it able to use its wings. I have seen the uncommon sight of about five thousand Gannets, on a perfectly smooth sea, and only about one

in a hundred of those birds was able to leave the water. Numbers of them were flapping their long wings on the sea and paddling rapidly with their feet, but they found it an almost hopeless task to rise into the air.

On the steepest cliffs of this small island large colonies of Kittiwakes were nesting, and it seemed almost impossible to get near enough to them to take a photograph. However, we saw one little group about two hundred feet down the black sides that we thought we could get to. Leaving our cameras above, we began to descend, to see if it would be possible to use them down below, and after an interesting climb we at last reached a ridge of rock from which we thought very successful photographs might be taken. Then we began to climb up for our apparatus. We had ascended about eighty feet, and to our dismay found that it would be very difficult indeed to get up again. However, we did not give in, and tried hard to reach a certain ledge that we could see above, but every time we tried to ascend the loose cliff gave way, and stones and rock went crashing down into the sea far below. There is no more nerve-trying experience that I know of than to feel your



The Author descending a Cliff
with his camera.

footsteps on a cliff giving way, especially when there is a dizzy drop below you of many yards. Our situation began to get serious, and going down the rock again for a few feet on to a firmer platform we discussed the situation, and found that there were only two things to do: either remain where we were all night, for the sun was sinking and no one could possibly have heard cries for assistance, or make an attempt to climb over that treacherous piece of loose cliff, and risk slipping down into the sea. This was certainly another Bird-land adventure, for here were those same two boys, whom the reader will have followed through other and earlier scrapes, in the most serious predicament they had ever been in, and I can give an assurance that both heartily wished themselves at the top.

We chose the latter of the two alternatives, and taking out our large jack-knives which had aided us on many previous occasions, we tried to cut, or rather hack, holes in the steep side of the cliff. But the hard stone simply blunted the blades, and we had to put them away again. My companion, climbing up a little higher and finding a firm place on which to hold, then

kicked a hole in the loose rock, while the stones slipped past my head and tumbled over and over, bouncing from rock to ledge in their downward flight, reminding us very forcibly what our fate would be if we were not careful. At last a fair-sized hole was made, and placing his foot in this he grasped the cliff firmly, while I climbed up and put my foot on his bent knee. Then getting another eighteen inches or so up this treacherous barrier, I was eventually able to get on to his shoulders and reached the solid rock above once more. With a very stout strap which we fortunately had with us my friend was helped up, and a few minutes later we reached the summit. Very glad, indeed, we were to get there!

The sun was now almost disappearing, and if we wanted any photographs it was necessary to take them at once; so hurrying back to our little cabin which formed our lodgings during our stay on the rock, we returned with ropes, and fastening these securely at the top of the cliff, we descended once more with cameras, and found it much easier going down and far easier coming up with a rope than without. Our ropes were not long enough to reach right down

Kittiwakes.

'Their plumage lit up with the last rays of the setting sun.'

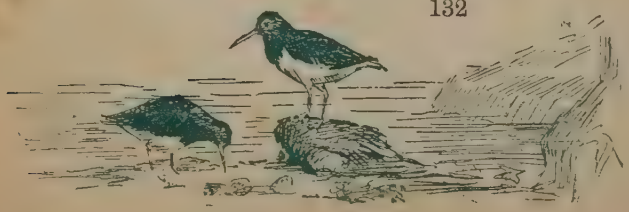
to the Kittiwakes' haunt, but they helped us over the treacherous piece of cliff that had given us so much trouble before. Leaving the ropes hanging on the rocks, and climbing along a narrow piece of rock, almost like the hump on a camel's back, we were able to sit astride this and expose plates, and with the last bright beams of the setting sun some of the photographs illustrating this chapter were taken.

Since then I have visited other haunts of the Gannet in these Islands, where the number of birds has been equal to three or four times that of the Bass Rock, but as these were much larger stretches of cliff and much higher, it was impossible to get as good a view of the birds as in the haunt just described.

There is, however, one little experience that I remember very vividly while photographing these birds on a gigantic cliff amongst the Western Islands of Scotland. I had been busy amongst the birds with my camera, and having exposed my last plate half an hour after sunset, I prepared to descend the thousand feet of loose, crumbling cliff that led to a certain lighthouse, where I was staying. I thought I should have plenty of time

to do this, and slinging my camera-case over my back I went down past many of the landmarks I had carefully noted during my ascent. But I climbed down over the higher sloping parts, and still found more cliff below me. Before I was half-way down twilight had almost disappeared, and here was I, alone on a cliff I had never climbed before, and completely lost too, for I had failed to find my landmarks during the last one hundred feet of descent.

The only thing to do was still to go down and trust to finding the narrow track which had been worn by other climbers. But I failed in this also, and I could still see the dark grey waters far, far below. Down I went, however, and at last came to a barrier which effectually prevented going further in that direction. It was a clear wall of rock, without a foothold of any kind on it. Up I had to go again and try another place. This time I was more fortunate, and at last came to a steep, slanting piece of cliff, which I ventured down, thinking I had reached the bottom. But when the base was reached, and I looked down, I found there was at least two hundred feet more before I could get to the beach.



Kittiwake and Young

The friendly beams of the lighthouse could not be seen, and I knew I was going down the wrong part of that great three-sided rock. Having gone so far I thought the better plan would be to continue in the track I was going, and so still down I went, and many a stone or piece of rock dislodged by my boots went bounding down. I held my breath with excitement until it struck the beach.

I must confess it was the only time I ever felt really scared on a cliff, and once I thought it was all up with me, and I vowed that if ever I reached the level ground I would not attempt climbing strange cliffs in the evening again for as long as I lived. How long it took me to scramble down I do not know, but to cut a long story short, I eventually, when it was dark, arrived at the rough, rock-broken beach, with soiled clothes and tired feet and nerves almost gone. But the latter, which never desert me for long, soon returned, and, scrambling along the shore, I at last saw the lighthouse flashing up at regular intervals, and if ever beams of light were welcome, it was then. I was soon comfortably seated before a blazing fire, for in the North a fire

is often welcome at midsummer, and after a hearty meal I was ready to turn in and sleep.

The next morning I again went on the same cliff, and tried to find out how I lost my track, and discovered where it was I went wrong. When I saw the steep, loose, crumbling cliffs that I had climbed down the night before, my blood ran cold. No amount of money would have induced me to negotiate those cliffs without a rope, and how I succeeded in getting down without a mishap I never could understand.

The Gannet, or Solan Goose, lives to a great age, for a bird, and this may account for the numbers that cover their breeding haunts; there are not many places in these Islands occupied by the birds, but where they are found we notice that countless numbers flock to the spot. They like a rocky island, with great cliffs rising straight from the water, and on the narrow shelves they make their nests of seaweed, which they collect while swimming around their island home. Only a single egg is laid; although I have on several occasions seen two in a nest, it is very probable

that this second egg was laid by another bird. The egg when first laid is a delicate pale blue colour, but very soon becomes thickly encrusted over with a white, chalky substance, and very much soiled by the sitting bird. There is always a very unpleasant smell surrounding the Gannets' nests, and, indeed, this can be detected some distance from their rock, if the wind is blowing towards us. When we actually get amongst the birds, the stench is almost as bad as that surrounding a Cormorants' nesting colony, and that is, I think, the most terrible smell in the world.

The young Gannets, when they arrive, are ugly birds, but about a week after leaving the shell they are covered with white down, and look old-fashioned little creatures. When they get their feathers they are very different from their parents, and are really beautiful birds, mottled on the breast with greyish black and the tips of many feathers white. The head and neck are dark slate colour, the beak nearly black, and the uninitiated would imagine them to be a different species from their almost pure white parents. In the second year these young birds become

whiter, and more so in the third; it is not until the fourth year that they get their full plumage, and some not even then.

While watching a large colony of Gannets, we see hundreds of these young birds about, soaring and following their elders, and a wonderfully glorious sight it is, to stand on the brow of a great frowning precipice and see thousands of Solan Geese, which have a stretch of wing of six feet, passing and repassing in one long, unending procession. I have stood for hours watching such a scene without getting tired, and indeed it was almost necessary to tear oneself away from such a fascinating sight. I only wish my pen was powerful enough to describe this romantic Bird-land scene; but when I attempt to pen this picture of flight at its best, with thousands of white wings floating around, words simply fail me:

'. . . At times the Solan's wing,
As if to show its majesty of strength,
Brushed near us with a roughly winnowing noise;
And now aloft, a lessening speck was seen,
Over the cloudlets, 'mid engulfing blue.'

Gannet preparing to plunge into the sea.
Gannet guarding its egg.

CHAPTER XII

Amongst the Sea-birds

THE Arctic and Sandwich Terns are two of the most delightful sea-birds it is possible to watch. There is something extremely graceful in their flight, and when we visit their breeding haunts it is a sight never to be forgotten. A favourite place for laying their eggs is on a small, low-lying island, and in the North Sea there is one such haunt tenanted by thousands of these sea-swallows, as many fishermen call them. The island is surrounded with a shingle-beach with many black rocks dotted about; above these are large quantities of seaweed washed up by the winter storms, and on the higher portions of the island there are patches of white sea-campion.

As soon as the keel of our boat grates on

the shingle there is a great commotion amongst the birds, and many thousands of white wings seem to rise in front of us. As we land and go forward amongst the birds, thousands more seem to spring from the flowers and seaweed and float around us. The noise of the small waves washing in amongst the rocks is quite drowned in a vast chorus of bird-calls, and harsh notes they are too, for the cry of the Tern is not half as beautiful as his flight.

The Terns' island home is a scene never to be forgotten, for around it the sea is the most brilliant emerald-green, and nowhere have I seen waters so bright. With the blue sky and the white wings, and the sun-kissed wavelets all around, it makes a Bird-land picture that cannot be erased from the mind. We see many Oyster-Catchers running about the rocks on the shore, and really beautiful birds they look, with their black and white plumage and brilliant crimson beaks and red legs. If we watch them carefully, we will see them take food to their young, and if we then run forward and search diligently we shall find a small, fluffy bird crouching under a large stone. While we photograph this, the mother flies

Young Sandwich Tern stretching its wing.

swiftly past and round our heads, giving out angry calls, and she does not cease scolding us until we are far away.

While watching these engaging birds I was much amused by a party of eight tourists who visited the island. When their boat drew up to the shingle one of their number, with a loud voice, directed landing operations. He stood on the side of the fishing-boat and told the others how to walk down the plank leading from the boat to the shore, and his seven companions safely landed. Then as soon as he moved from his lofty perch his foot slipped and he landed with a loud splash in the cold sea; his camera went with him, but he reached shore safely, with his dignity somewhat fallen and his ardour and clothes damped. The party soon left the island and sailed away, and I felt quite sorry for the visitor, for there was very little wind, and in the long sail to the shore he must have been very cold and miserable.

On an island not very far from the Terns' home a number of Kittiwakes were nesting. These birds choose very narrow ledges on which to build their nests, and it is often difficult to get down to them with a camera. But by

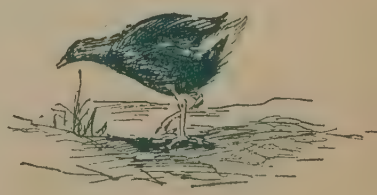
careful climbing we were able to get very near to some of the more interesting nests. Many of these contained young, while a few had eggs, and in one of my photographs the mother will be seen guarding her helpless youngster, while by the latter there was an egg just chipping. Kittiwakes are interesting sitters for the Nature photographer, for if we are careful it is possible to get very close before the birds leave.

If I were asked which is the greatest robber in Bird-land, I should say the Lesser Black-backed Gull. His whole life is given up to stealing, and I have seen these thieves making a raid on colonies of other sea-birds and carrying away large numbers of eggs. If one of these Gulls should leave its nest unguarded one of its species would quickly swoop down and devour the three large eggs. They evidently know a good thing when they see it, for the eggs of the Lesser Black-backed Gull are very good eating, and a friend and myself, while staying in one famous haunt of these birds for a few days, lived almost entirely on these large eggs and found them very good indeed, especially when our appetites had been sharpened by a hard day's work with our cameras on the cliffs.

Kittiwake and young.

In this haunt there was one very bold Gull, and every time that we went near its nest it rose high up in the air behind us, and then with a rush of its great wings it came down towards us and attempted to strike our heads, and instantly dashed up again, only to keep on repeating the performance. It took a fair amount of nerve to stand perfectly still when the large bird approached, and it was next to impossible to refrain from ducking one's head as it struck. The eggs of these Gulls vary very much in colour; some are a deep rich brown covered with black blotches and spots, others are almost yellow, and some we saw were a pale blue without any spots.

The Herring Gull is larger than the species just mentioned, and is often found in large numbers frequenting fishing villages. In one charming little village on the Scottish coast, where I have spent many happy days, Herring Gulls seem to abound. They could be seen about mid-day sitting on the chimneys of the cottages on the look-out for food. They were so exceedingly tame that they would actually walk into the houses and take food thrown down for them.

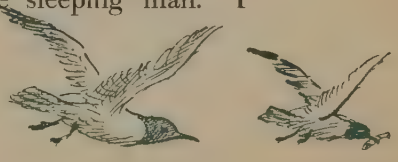


Walking around one day, I heard a tremendous noise proceeding from a back yard of one of the cottages, and on going round to find out the cause of this commotion I saw that some fish offal had been thrown on to the top of a large dust-bin, and before the Gulls could reach it a large cat had pounced on to the food and was contentedly eating it with happy, half-closed eyes, while a Herring Gull was standing about two yards away, and with beak open wide, head bent forward, and raised wings, was giving out such a medley of unearthly noises that any ordinary cat would have bolted for a mile at least. This pussy, however, was evidently used to these noisy visitors, and, like all its species if any other animal looks on, it devoured every piece of fish, while the distressed Gull was loudly lamenting its ill luck. To make matters worse, pussy seated herself comfortably down, and while the Gull seemed to be swearing at her she placidly lifted her paw and washed her face, and so added insult to injury. The Gull flew away, and seating itself on a favourite chimney, opened its big beak wide and wailed like a child in pain.

I remember a little experience that we had

Herring Gull on the chimney of a fisherman's cottage.

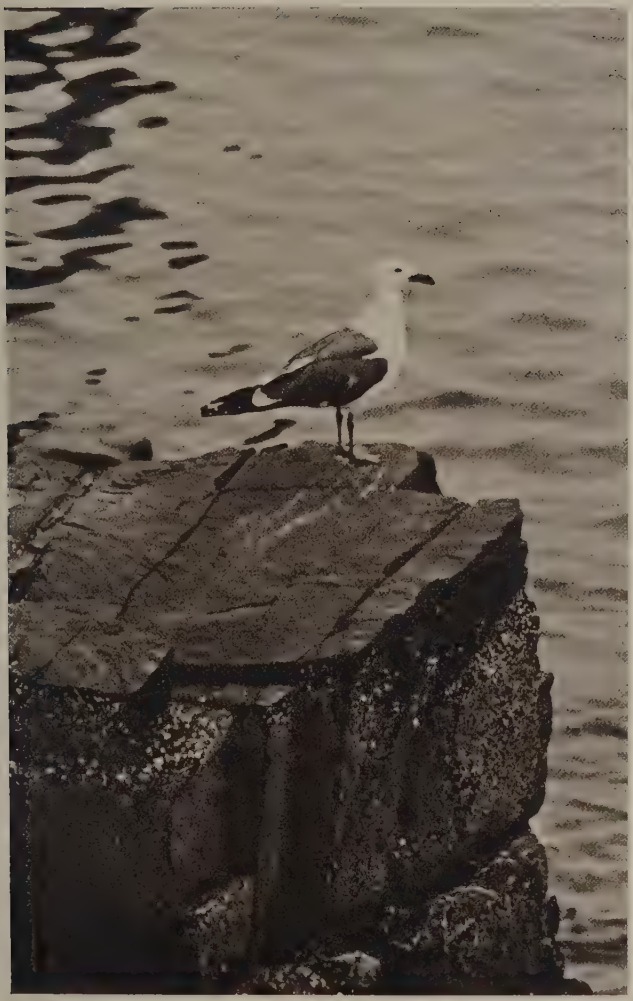
while staying in a cottage in a celebrated sea-birds' haunt. It was the only cottage near, and there was not another dwelling-place for miles around with the exception of a lighthouse. Unfortunately for us the weather continued very foggy for nearly a week and somewhat upset our photographic plans. The great fog-horn at the lighthouse kept booming out at intervals of about a minute, and as long as I live I shall never forget our first night in that two-roomed cottage. The owner was an exceedingly fat man, and he, of course, had the only bed the room possessed; with him slept another man. My friend had a bed rigged up on a wooden form, while I had a sack of chaff (more sack than chaff) placed on a door which had been taken from its hinges. I tried to sleep and could not, for the foghorn's tremendous blast prevented that, and then between these blasts of loud, unmusical bellowing the fat gentleman snored at regular intervals with a noise which competed fairly well with the foghorn. And so it went on the whole night through—a loud boom, then twenty bursts of snoring, another boom, and the same regular number of echoes from the sleeping man. I



rammed my fingers into my ears, but still those two noises penetrated, and I was quite unable to sleep.

What made it all the more aggravating was the knowledge that my friend was enjoying perfect slumber, and I verily believe he could sleep through anything, for I have known him to do so on top of a vehicle, driving in the teeth of a blinding snowstorm. However, the welcome beams of the rising sun at last lit up the small room, and I was very glad indeed to get outside. The reader will judge how I felt when at breakfast-time our stout host informed us that 'one of you young gents was a-snoring the whole night through and kept me awake.' I did not say anything, but imagined that he must have been dreaming that he was awake the whole night through, and the foghorn might then have been mistaken for one of us.

The male Eider Duck is one of the most beautiful sea-birds that I know, and I have sometimes seen large flocks of them around the coasts in the evening. The nest of the Eider Duck is a wonderful structure of that beautiful, light, warmth-giving down that is used so much for making quilts. The eggs are simply sur-



Lesser Black-backed Gull.

rounded and covered with a thick layer of this down, and one would imagine that when the hen took so much trouble to construct a nest she was preparing a home for her young; but as soon as these have all left the shells they are taken by their mother down to the sea. It is a pretty Bird-land picture to watch her walking slowly along, picking her way carefully round the boulders and larger stones, and the six or seven tiny Ducklings waddling on behind. When the water is reached the mother goes in and calls her babies. They venture as far as the wash from the waves, and then as soon as the water touches their feet they seem to know what to do and bravely swim out to their mother. We see large families together sometimes, perhaps six Ducks and about thirty Ducklings, all riding gracefully on the swelling and heaving water. They never return to their cosy home, and dozens of these deserted nests with a large quantity of down in them are often seen.

The Sheldrake, another Duck found on the coast, makes a very warm and beautiful nest, but it is often in a difficult place to photograph, usually being at the end of a long burrow. We were very fortunate to find the one in my

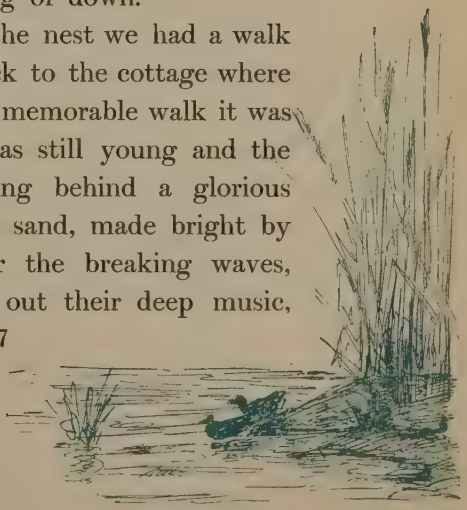
illustration. We were walking over a large stretch of sand dunes on the Welsh coast one day in June. There seemed to be sand everywhere. For miles there was nothing but yellow sand, driven by wind into fantastic mounds and small valleys. A few shoots of grass showed here and there, a brilliant green against the monotonous yellow. Rushes also, with sharp points, were growing in clumps, and all these, grass and rushes, bent in one direction—away from the sea. Beyond the dunes was a magnificent stretch of level sand. Great breakers were rolling up and travelling with a rush across the shining beach, the noise reaching us in one continuous muffled roar. Spray was driving inland like a travelling mist, and it passed us as we worked over the sand.

It seemed almost hopeless to search for a Sheldrake's nest in that vast tract, and I had just mentioned to my three companions that it was like searching for the proverbial needle in a haystack when we saw two Sheldrakes flying towards us. We all dropped on the sand and waited. One of the Ducks flew away, while the other settled on a large mound of sand standing by itself. We gave the

Eider Duck. Sheldrake's nest.

bird about five minutes to settle, and I saw it walking amongst the long grass and rushes. It then disappeared round the mound. We approached the spot from different directions, and we were so situated that it would have been impossible for the Duck to leave without our seeing it. Surrounding the mound, we began to search, and as there was no bird in view we knew that it must be in one of the numerous burrows on the mound. We examined several of these burrows, and at the entrance of one we found a small piece of white down about the size of a sixpence. I knew then that we had found the Sheldrake's home, and a short distance inside that burrow we discovered one of the most beautiful nests of its kind we have ever seen, containing eight pale-green eggs embedded in a thick ring of down.

After photographing the nest we had a walk of nearly three miles back to the cottage where we were staying; and a memorable walk it was too, for the morning was still young and the tide had receded, leaving behind a glorious stretch of golden-yellow sand, made bright by the sun's beams. Near the breaking waves, which were still giving out their deep music,



several Herring Gulls were standing with their reflections sharply outlined in the glimmering sand. And flying around a long, rugged headland jutting out to sea were hundreds of Sea Gulls, looking like flakes of whitest snow as they soared around their black, rocky home. On our left, over the dunes of sand, many rabbits were seen; they just waited to look wonderingly at the four intruders who had invaded their lonely haunt, and then, turning, bolted right away to their burrows. They were so much the colour of the sand that their white scuts were the only thing visible.

Many birds greeted us on our homeward walk — Wheatears, Common Buntings, and Pipits. A Merlin was seen, and no doubt had a nest on the sand hills.

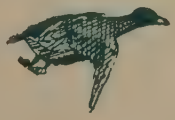
At last, leaving the sand behind us and climbing up the grass-covered cliff where many beautiful flowers were growing, the cliffs in places being covered with that hardy and pretty flower the sea-pink, and in other places with bladder campion — we reached the cottage soon after nine o'clock, and were ready for a hearty breakfast before setting out on another bird expedition.

Kittiwakes.

Their nests are built on the narrowest ledges.

One of the most remarkable sights to be seen on the rocky coasts is a large colony of Guillemots. They seem to be packed so close together on the ledges on the cliff, that one wonders how they manage to exist. On the narrowest ledges they sit in rows, and look almost exactly like little regiments of soldiers all standing at 'attention.' It will be seen by my photograph that on some of the larger table-like rocks the birds are packed indiscriminately, and as very many of these are looking after a single egg, they must certainly have great difficulty. Some are opening their beaks, and look exactly as if they were gasping for breath. If one should leave its companions and fly away, when it returns it often has to settle on its companions' heads or backs, and then squeeze and shuffle its way between. Those around, angry at being thus disturbed, peck at the troublesome intruder, and with discordant calls try to drive her away. A colony of these birds resembles nothing so much as a large, discontented, squabbling crowd.

Amongst the Guillemots we often see a bird with black plumage and pure white breast. This is the Razorbill; and a remarkable bird he looks. It is not so popular or so well known



as some of the other birds mentioned in this book. It is found laying its large, single egg on the ledges of precipitous cliffs around the sea-coast. On the Bass Rock I was able, with the aid of a long rope, to descend to where some were nesting on narrow shelves of rock. Like the Guillemot, each bird lays only one egg, and these are very large for the size of the bird, and handsomely marked, but do not vary in colour so much as the Guillemot. The bird sits very close, and on some of the rugged cliffs on the south-east coast of Scotland, where there are large colonies of both species, I have been able to get within a yard of them.

The one shown in my illustration had a young one underneath her which she guarded very jealously. When I visited the same bird on a later occasion I noticed that the young Razorbill had slipped off the narrow ledge and had fallen about four feet down the cliff on to a still smaller ledge. All around it numbers of Lesser Black-backed Gulls were hovering, waiting for an opportunity of snatching up this plump young bird; but the mother on the ledge above kept a sharp look-out and continually popped her head over the side to see if her baby

Egg of Razorbill *in situ.* Razorbill sitting.

was all right. The Razorbill has a powerful beak, quite black, with some curious marks on it, and it hardly looked the kind of beak one would care to have on one's fingers. A Puffin's bite is bad enough, and I did not feel inclined to allow the Razorbill to test its strength on my hand.

Why is it that the innocent Puffin is always held up to ridicule? If I was asked which is the most comical bird that I have seen I should unhesitatingly say the Puffin. The curious expression which the birds wear may account for the fun always poked at them. Each one seems to have a different expression on its funny face, and as you stalk towards them with your camera it is more than amusing to watch them. They sit in long rows on the cliff-side, and if you go up to them quickly all fly away long before you are near enough to expose a plate, but by careful stalking and moving very slowly it is actually possible to get within a yard of them. As you approach, one and then another will bob up and down, turn its comical face towards you, and then bob again, as though undecided whether to fly away or not.

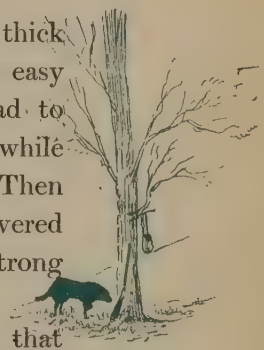
I know one favourite breeding haunt of the

Puffin where it is possible to see thousands of them dotted about the broken cliff-side, and where the most careful stalking is necessary, for one slip of the foot and the photographer would be dashed to pieces. On that great rock in the Clyde, Ailsa Craig, the rocks seem to be covered with these birds. Evening is the best time to see them, for then they settle on the great boulders in small parties, and with their white breasts turned towards the setting sun, the great expanse of rough cliff looks as though it was dotted over with hundreds of thousands of patches of snow.

When standing on the west side of this birds' island—for in the summer months Ailsa Craig is tenanted by millions of sea-birds—and looking up towards the summit and the surrrounding heights, we gaze upon one of those Bird-land pictures that make life worth living. Climbing to the top and facing the west, we see the sun sinking in a mass of wild, wind-torn clouds, while the Isle of Arran and the adjacent land is purple against the sunset sky. The sea was calm and tinted with the sunset colours, and suddenly, without any warning, the whole scene was turned from a yellow colour into a beautiful

Puffins.

tint of soft crimson, and Old Scotland's wild hills, stretching far away, were changed into mountains of red. The sea took up the colour, and even the rock at my feet and the Puffins' white breasts were changed. I looked out upon one of those great scenes that seem to take us into such close touch with the great God of Nature. While drinking in the glories there spread before me, and standing alone on the summit of this solitary rock, over one thousand feet above the crimson waters, I felt glad that I had learned to read Nature, and it filled me with an indescribable longing to know more about the works of the Creator.



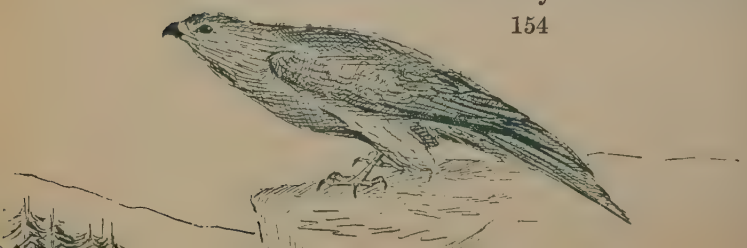
The next day was very windy, with a thick sea fog enveloping the rock, and it was not easy to take photographs. Several times I had to hide up behind large boulders of rock while the soaking mist travelled fast past me. Then the cloud moved away and left the rock covered in bright sunshine, but the wind was so strong that it was really difficult to stand.

There was, however, one photograph that I particularly wanted. Accordingly, making my way along the treacherous loose cliff, I at last reached the spot, but was met with a gust

of wind that nearly swept me off my feet. But digging my boots into the ledge of rock, I at last secured a firmer foothold, and holding my 'Bird-land' camera in both hands, I focussed the feathered sitter. As I was doing so a gust of wind came with terrific force against me, and for a moment—it seemed more like an hour—I balanced on the edge of that fearful precipice. There was nothing to hold on to except the camera, and I gripped that tightly, for I thought 'If I go, that must go also.' Fortunately I fell towards the cliff instead of the sea, and making one more attempt, the exposure was made.

The wind was still rising, and so I made my way down. As I descended, the little steam launch was observed far below like a shell bobbing on the water, coming to take me back. If I had stayed on the rock another hour I should have been storm-bound, for a heavy storm raged round the famous Craig for four days, and we had, as it was, a very rough passage back to the mainland.

The sea around a Puffins' breeding ground seems to be covered with numberless hosts of these birds. When they all leave the water,



Lesser Black-backed Gulls.

Watching the Photographer. A flight round.

as they occasionally do, there is a noise like the sound of artillery in the distance. Thousands of wings beating the water at the same moment can only be described as a loud muffled roar. At other times the whole flock will dive, and the sea, which a moment before was covered with birds, is now quite clear. Then one by one they pop up, and in many of their beaks is a small silvery fish, which they carry to their sitting mates. The large, single white egg is laid in a hole in the ground. I have sometimes placed my hand in these holes, and it has always been met by a determined bite. This is not so bad; but when the bird inside uses her claws it is worse, for they are like the sharpest needle-points. I well remember one bird that was so vicious that it left six little holes in my hand, as well as one or two marks made by the powerful beak.

I was showing the photograph of the group of four Puffins to a lady friend a short time ago. It was in a frame and a number of my other bird photographs were with it, and I asked her which frame she liked best. After looking at all the photographs with a critical

eye, she pointed to this group of poor innocent Puffins and said, 'I think I like those "beery"-looking birds best!' Well, when we examine them they certainly look as though they had just returned from some rather jovial festivities.

On that group of islands off the Northumberland coast known as the Farnes, and made famous by the brave act of Grace Darling when the *Forfarshire* was wrecked in 1838, and also one of the most celebrated of bird haunts, a colony of Cormorants annually try to breed. But as a rule their efforts are frustrated by the Lesser Black-backed Gulls, which swarm there. If the Cormorants leave for a minute a whole host of these greedy robbers swoop down, and without actually settling on the nests, pick up the eggs as they pass. In a few seconds I have seen these Gulls take away over a dozen eggs.

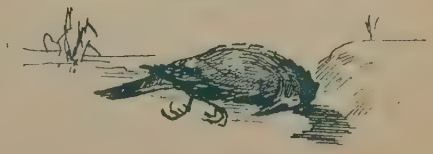
The nest of the Cormorant is really a small pinnacle of seaweed, some of the nests being a yard high. The material, standing in the hot sun, soon begins to smell. Added to this there are often pools of evil-smelling sea-water around and numbers of dead fish, so that the

Eider Duck sitting.

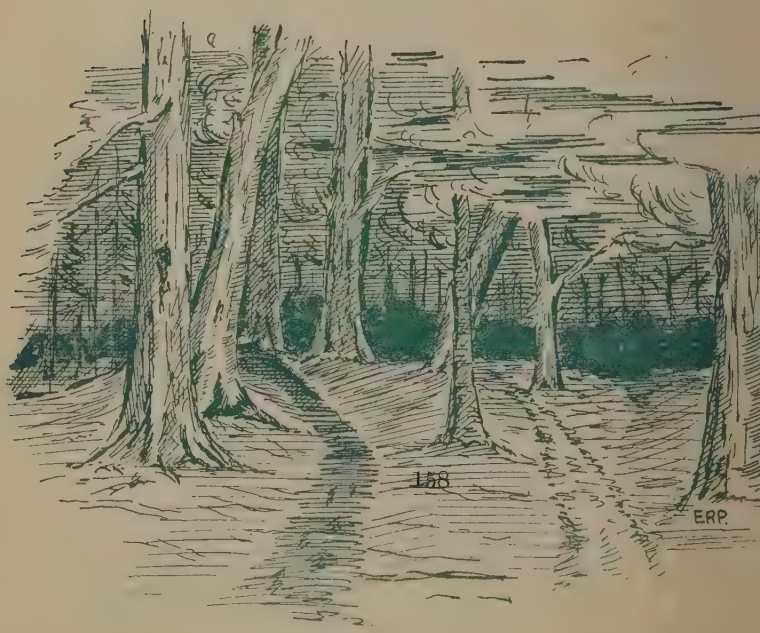
This is the bird from which the beautiful soft eider-down is obtained.

stench in these haunts is sometimes almost unbearable. Six eggs are sometimes laid, and when fresh are a pale greenish blue in colour, but, like the Gannet's eggs, soon become encrusted with a thick chalk, and look very dirty. If you disturb a sitting Cormorant, it will often open its large beak and bring up its last meal, no doubt finding that it is easier to fly with less load. There are always Gulls around ready to swoop down and pick up these fish which are dropped; indeed, the Cormorant's life, in the breeding season, seems to be one continuous battle with these enemies.

It is not every lover of Nature who is able to see the interesting birds described in this chapter in their own haunts, and an ordinary photograph after all gives a poor idea of what the live bird is like, for it lacks motion. But I have hit upon an idea which will bring these sights and scenes within the reach of all. I have had a special kinematograph constructed for bird photography, and now in my lectures I am able, as it were, to bring these wild haunts before my audiences. They not only see the birds on the sea-washed cliffs, but all kinds of



feathered friends, full of natural animation, in their own homes, whither I have penetrated with this up-to-date camera, and actually pictured the private lives of the birds. On the screen I am thus able to show the secrets of the woodlands, the fields, and the shore to those who are not able, or privileged, to follow these wild creatures in their secluded homes. This camera has a special lens fitted to it, which makes it possible to photograph small birds at a distance. The results I have obtained will certainly be a revelation to those who are interested in Nature photography.



Puffins.

Guillemots.

A discontented, squabbling crowd.

CHAPTER XIII

A Tragedy of the Hills

THE wind was tearing over the bending mountain grass in fitful gusts, now driving along with such force as to make it almost impossible to travel against it, and the next minute dropping somewhat so that the tall blades of grass had a chance of holding up their heads for a moment. But ever and anon that cold, beating blast returned, and down went the grass again. A loud, wild whisper seemed to travel over the broken hilltop, and then die away beyond, until another whistle came up with the breeze and followed the first. The rain, instead of falling, seemed to be following the course of the wind and as it met our faces almost cut into our flesh. Before we had faced that terrible weather for ten minutes we were wet through to the skin, and our boots,

although watertight in the ordinary sense, were almost full, and what is more uncomfortable than boots full of water which cannot run out? But the keeper and I trudged gamefully forward, for he was almost as keen a naturalist as I, and eight miles away from us, in the direction from which the wind was coming, there was a Dunlin's nest waiting to be photographed. The half-plate field camera and plates were packed in a waterproof case, but the penetrating rain, driven against it like pellets of shot from a gun, found its way through and made the wood of the apparatus swell.

During my travels in Bird-land I have experienced some good samples of our British weather, both on sea and land, but never have I attempted photography on such a day as this. At last, wet, cold, and miserable, we found the nest, and the entertaining birds were doing their best to attract us from the spot; but we were too much concerned over fitting up the apparatus to notice them. The camera was unpacked with difficulty, for our fingers were so numbed with the icy rain and wind that we could hardly feel with them. The keeper held the camera while I en-

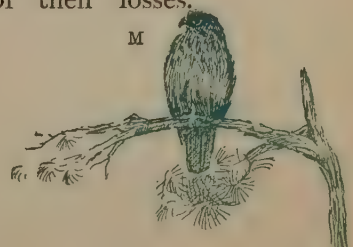
Dunlin's nest.

Found on the summit of a wild Welsh mountain.

deavoured to focus. At last this was accomplished, the plate placed in, and an exposure of three seconds made, but the whole performance took over half an hour. Then, packing up, we tried to warm our half-frozen limbs and began the return journey.

The wind and rain were now at our backs, and it was not quite so bad as facing it, but as we pushed on the rain increased and the wind seemed to double its fury. We counted the miles as best we could, the keeper making the pace for one, then I advanced with the next, and so on, until about seven o'clock in the evening we came in sight of the little whitewashed inn, low down in the valley; this homely place was reached at last, and after a change of clothes we enjoyed a well-earned meal, and felt none the worse for our adventure. At the end of my notes in my diary referring to this little expedition after one nest, I find two words which express almost a whole chapter of description; they are these: 'Roaring appetite!'

Many tragedies happened on the Welsh hills during that terrible storm, and the sheep-farmers complained bitterly of their losses.



Away up one bleak mountain, over which the storm burst with such fury, on a large, lonely stretch of open moor, there stands a lamb, a little over a month old. It runs a few yards, then stops, tries to turn and face the storm, and bleats piteously. Again it runs on, lifts its head and calls again. There is no other living creature in sight, and this one solitary lamb, before the storm came down, had wandered too far from its playmates, and now it is here alone, lost to the whole world—a lonely, frightened animal. Now it tries to find shelter behind a grass tuft, but is driven on, ever on by the relentless gale. It *bleats* loudly once or twice more, and at last, finding a grey crag in the broken hillside, seeks shelter behind that, and falls down exhausted. There it remains until the beams of the rising sun once more break over the hills, which look calmer after the wild night, although the wind is still blowing half a gale. Raising its head it calls *baa-a-a!* but the only answer is a whistle from the mountain grass as the wind surges over the sloping moor.

A big black shadow flashes past, and another frightened *baa-a-a-a!* is uttered. The shadow

Carrion Crow—'Krraar, krraar.'

The big black outlaw which is hated so by shepherds.

returns, and the Carrion Crow, with a cry of delight, settles on the rock, looks down at the terrified, crouching lamb, and then, with another harsh *krraar !* opens his wings, and without more ado pounces down on the animal. With a few powerful pecks with his big beak, this black outlaw of the air begins his murderous attack, and the struggling lamb is soon put to death.

There is a loud 'bark' above, and a Raven begins to descend. The Crow looks up and angrily lifts his wings and snaps his beak at the new-comer ; but the larger bird is allowed his share, and then these having their fill, and tearing off some portions which they carry away, the half-eaten carcase is left lying there. Presently a Buzzard joins in the feast ; his mate is attracted from the nest in the dingle below by one or two loud cries given out by this miniature Eagle, and they too carry some away after eating a portion. A few hours later only a few bones and a little wool remain to tell the story of this hillside tragedy.

And the wind still sings through the grass, and the black, rolling clouds are driving up from the north-west, and labouring slowly

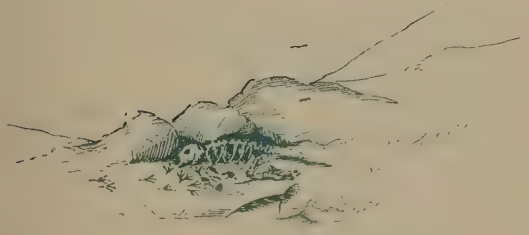
against it over the open valley the Crow, hated alike by shepherd, keeper, and farmer, is travelling homewards, contented and happy after his big meal. He was the chief offender, for neither the Raven nor the Buzzard would have touched the lamb while life remained in it.

Trudging up the moor there comes a man, and two well-trained dogs are with him, obeying every word of his. First he wanders over the lower portions of the hill, and then on the higher, and at last stands in front of the old crag, attracted thither by a bark from one of the dogs. He mutters a few angry words, moves the carcase of the lamb with his foot, stoops down and picks up a brown feather; then turning, the shepherd shakes his fist in the direction of the dingle, and calling the dogs, hurries thither. As he approaches, the Buzzards leave their nest—first the male, which soars up and gives out his wild, mewing cry, followed by the hen. The shepherd, still holding in his hand the Buzzard's feather, picks up a few large stones, and then, making his way to the brow of the dingle, throws them down towards the nest, almost hidden in the ivy. The third

Red Grouse sitting.
Nest and eggs of the same bird.

attempt is successful, and a large stone enters the nest with a crash, and the two fine eggs are smashed. Looking at his work for a moment, he flings the other pebbles away, and uttering a few more angry words at the birds soaring above him, he wends his way down the hillside and makes a short cut home.

The two birds sit silent and still on a rock above their now desolate home, their heads drawn in and all their feathers ruffled. And away on the higher mountain the wild wind is rending and tearing at the grass-blades, and driving them before it, soughing as it travels fast over the undulating moorland and whistling with fury on the open, level tracts.



CHAPTER XIV

The Kestrel

THIS very beautiful bird, the commonest of our British Falcons, is one of the most entertaining of all our birds of prey. The Kestrel's method of hunting is very different from that of the Eagle or Sparrow Hawk. There is no dash or excitement about him when following his prey; quite the contrary, there is a quietness in all his actions.

Many birds have the power of hovering over their prey; the Terns and Gulls, and even the common Sparrow I have seen doing this, but the little Brown Hawk, as the Kestrel is sometimes called, hovers to the greatest perfection. Although this species is daily to be seen in the fields, it is with never-failing interest that I watch him soaring or sailing

Kestrel 'sunning' its tail and enjoying the warmth.

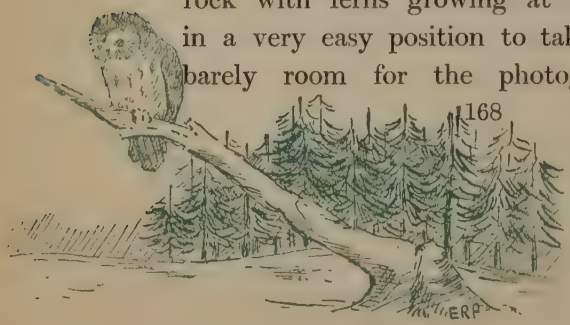
Note the expression of pleasure in the bird's eye.

over the green meadows or snow-covered fields. His method of capturing his prey is familiar to all country ramblers. The bird sails gracefully over the fields, and then hovers for a moment or two, and with head on one side he looks down and examines every inch of the ground below. If a group of birds are seen, or a mouse running about the stubble is observed, the Kestrel will hover over it and then drop a yard or two and then hover again, and when only about forty feet above ground, the bird's wings are placed at its side, and it practically dives on to its prey. I once saw one drop on to a Starling; but just as the bird of prey neared the ground the one attacked saw its danger and dashed under the neck of a cow which was grazing. The Kestrel like a flash followed and picked up the terrified bird without touching the ground.

About twelve years ago I set a trap in a field for mice; a large rat was caught in this, and before I discovered this fact a Kestrel had seen it, attacked and killed the captured animal, and afterwards devoured it. I saw the Kestrel hovering over the trap and,

understanding what he was doing, left him to enjoy his meal.

The Kestrel makes no nest, but just scratches out a hollow on a ledge of a cliff or on the ground. On the Welsh hills I have seen these nests in very simple places, where it was possible to reach the eggs by standing on tip-toe. The photograph in this chapter was taken on these wild hills, where the Kestrel is always to be seen. Often the nest-cavity is lined with a few castings, as they are called; for all the indigestible portions of mice, such as fur and bones, are cast up by the bird in the form of pellets, and as incubation proceeds many of these are added. There are often to be seen a few feathers around the nest, which have dropped from the wings or tail of the sitting bird. The four to six rusty-red eggs, some light and others extremely dark, are very beautiful, and lying amongst their dull surroundings are not always easily seen. The nest containing five eggs on a ledge of rock with ferns growing at the side was not in a very easy position to take, for there was barely room for the photographer as well



Nest of the Kestrel on a narrow ledge of a Welsh cliff.

as the camera; but with the valuable help of my friend Mr. Gwynne-Vaughan, who held me up on the ledge, while he was in a very uncomfortable and not exactly safe position himself, several successful exposures were made.

The Kestrel would undoubtedly be much more numerous than it is, if it was not for the fact that there are very many farmers who shoot it whenever an opportunity occurs. The chief food of the Kestrel is mice, voles, and beetles, and it very seldom takes a bird. All our ornithologists agree that it is one of the most useful friends of the agriculturist, but I know one or two haunts where this bird is badly persecuted. Besides being an exceedingly useful bird, it is also a very beautiful one, and it is a Bird-land sight not to be forgotten to see one of these Kestrels, after a hard-earned and good meal, sitting in the bright sun of early spring and sunning its tail in the way shown in my photograph. The bird photographer, although he has many failures, has also times of success, and I was never more pleased than when I secured this photograph showing the bird in such a characteristic position. When sunning

themselves the birds will open their wings and spread every feather in their tail, and with half-closed eyes seem to be thoroughly enjoying the warmth. All birds are fond of thus sunning their feathers, but the birds of prey do it more frequently than other species; the Golden Eagle is especially fond of this pretty habit. When taking the photograph I was crouching in a doubled-up position and watching every movement of the bird through the 'finder' of my 'Bird-land' camera, following and focussing it as it moved about the branch. Then to my delight it settled down, and opening its beautiful tail and spreading every feather, it enjoyed the glorious heat of the sun, and with eyes full of expression, which look to be speaking pleasure, the bird seemed lost to the world, and was no doubt as happy as a bird could be.

A photograph like this shows the advantage of having a camera which can be focussed while the plate is in position ready for exposure. Whatever kind of camera the Nature photographer uses, it should be strong. My two cameras have had some remarkable escapes in their time. The half-plate tripod

camera which I use for photographing nests has fallen sixty feet over a cliff, and if a bush had not stopped its wild flight it would have fallen another three hundred feet. Only a few weeks ago my bird camera had a fall which would have smashed many instruments to pieces. We were driving along a country lane in the Chough's haunt, when the horse, passing through a gate leading to a wide road, suddenly shied at something and threw the two occupants of the high trap and the camera into the road, turning the carriage completely over. The photographers were not badly damaged, but a strong tripod was smashed, my 'Bird-land' camera landed with a crash in the middle of the road, then rolled several yards, and found a resting-place in a ditch. A certain amount of damage was done, but not sufficient to prevent my taking the photographs that I wanted. These cameras have had many minor accidents and mishaps in their travels with their owner in the wilder parts of these Islands, and I expect that before they are past work they will have to go through many more.

But I think that one of the worst things

the poor Nature photographer has to put up with is 'chaff.' Often I have been taken for a madman by country yokels and others, and when one thinks the matter over, these people certainly have a certain amount of evidence to help them in their conclusions. For what can look more ridiculous to one who knows absolutely nothing about photography than to see a hot, worried man struggling to get the lens to point to something on the ground, or to see a cross but determined person frantically trying to fix a camera and tripod in the top branches of a tall tree? Why, the looks of sympathy that I have sometimes had, not to mention words, have almost made me pack up and run home.

As long as I live I shall never forget the expressions on the faces of a large number of soldiers who were standing round me while photographing a rusty old kettle without a spout. Of course they did not know that there was a Redstart's nest inside; they evidently thought that I was hard up for something to take, and had hit upon this novel subject.

But the most impressive look of sympathy I ever received was when I climbed a tree in

Golden Plover's nest.

Note the magnificent markings on the right-hand egg.

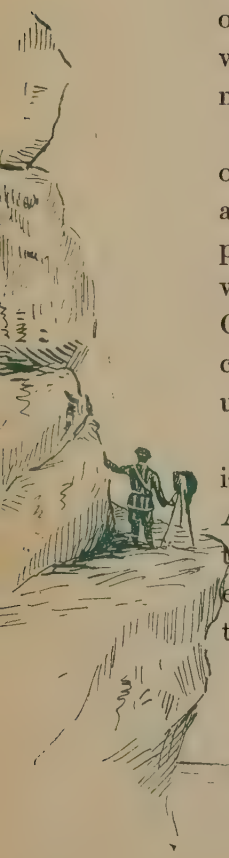
Wales to photograph a certain nest, and when I reached the higher branches with that 'funny box-looking arrangement,' the shepherd below really thought I was a harmless lunatic! I only wish I could have recorded the expression on his face of which I caught sight when I looked down.

When I first commenced Nature photography I was out in the fields with my companion, and we were attacked by three men who attempted to steal the camera. After a fight which lasted many minutes, during which I was nearly stunned by half a brick thrown at my head, another man came to our assistance, but not before one of the attacking party was making off with the camera. Giving chase, he was induced by gentle persuasion *or otherwise* to drop it, and we at last were victorious, although somewhat battered.

But I am wandering from my subject. Kestrels are very devoted parents and take great care of their young. These will follow their elders about for some days after leaving their home, and one of the prettiest bird exercises I ever watched was a pair of Kestrels teaching their young to fly. As I have de-

scribed this in a previous work I cannot repeat it here.

These little Hawks do not always secure their food by hovering, for I have seen them in the long grass of meadows searching carefully for beetles and other insects. This bird will often capture more than it can eat, and in such cases I have actually known it to cover up the undevoured portions with small pieces of stick, tufts of dried grass, and stones; but whether the bird returns to these unfinished meals I do not know.



The Kestrel, like the Sparrow Hawk, will often carry its quarry to a small grassy knoll and there devour it. I have seen a wide pathway in a Scotch pine wood dotted about with the remains of birds and small mammals. On searching, a Sparrow Hawk's nest was discovered in a tree above, and this plainly told us who were the culprits.

When the Kestrel has captured a mouse it is very interesting to watch him devour it. After settling, the prey is held in one foot and the bird gazes round with a fierce gleam in its eyes. When satisfied that no enemy is about, the Kestrel places the mouse under one foot,

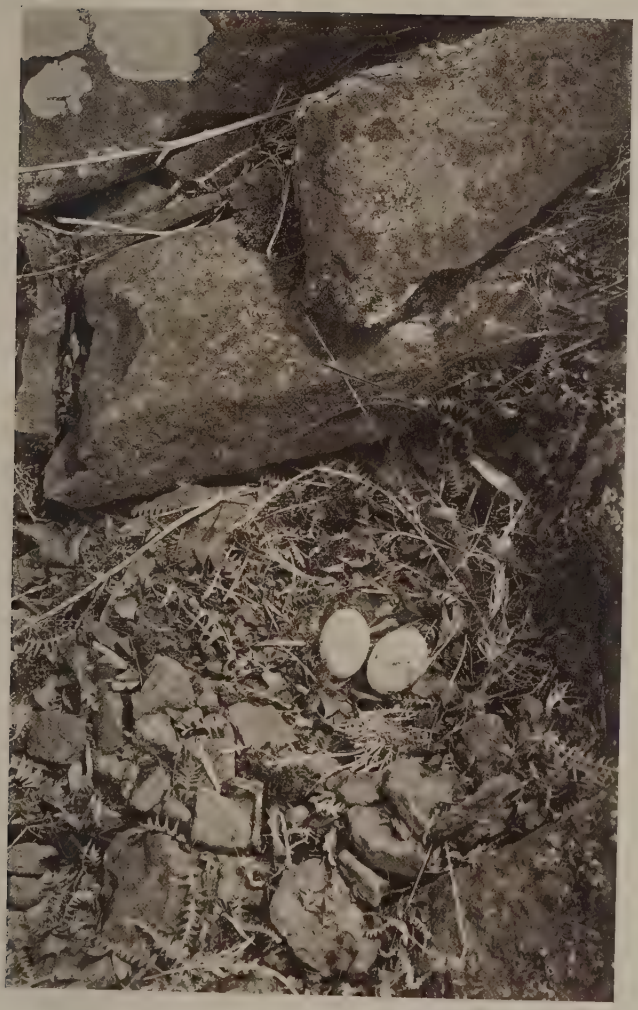
and pulls out the creature's eyes with its beak. Then placing both feet on the mouse, the bird of prey tugs at the skin; sometimes this suddenly gives and he goes flying backwards, but with a flap of his wings he regains his balance. When the body has been torn to pieces the bird carries the food to its mouth with one foot. After the mouse is devoured and only a few spots of blood remain on the moss-covered mound to tell the story, the Kestrel is very careful to clean his beak and feathers. When his toilet is quite completed, and he has shaken his feathers three or four times, he turns one eye up to the sky, opens his long wings, and floats up with a beautiful airy flight and is soon lost in the summer blue.

CHAPTER XV

Some Curious Bird Facts

IN many books on birds we are sometimes told that birds never do this, that, or the other thing. I have fallen into this trap myself, for in one of my works I make the statement that the Nightjar never makes a nest. The more I find out about birds, the more I am convinced that the statements that have been made in generations past by naturalists should not be followed, but that we should try to find out all the facts first-hand from Nature. I must confess that when I said that the Nightjar never made a nest I was repeating what I had learnt in scientific works on bird-life.

But that the Nightjar does make a nest sometimes is amply proved by my photograph



Nest and eggs of the Nightjar.

I took pains to secure a good picture of this uncommon occurrence, and also took measurements. The nest was found on one of the Welsh hills, and it was on a ledge of rock covered with a layer of earth. The bird had carried to the nest two dry tufts of grass with the roots attached, several pieces of dead bracken, three tufts of green moss pulled off a rock twelve inches away, one small twig two inches long, and about a dozen pieces of dry grass stems. The length of the nest was ten inches and the depth of the nest cavity two and a quarter inches, which the bird had worked out, evidently with her feet. This was a most interesting discovery, for I can find no record anywhere else of this bird having made a nest. There was a determined attempt here, however, for the nest was in such a position that everything had to be carried to it. In nearly every scientific treatise on birds we are told that the Willow Wren *always*—and the word is usually in italics—lines its nest with feathers, yet I have found and photographed a Willow Wren's nest that did not contain a vestige of a feather. At first I could not believe that it was a Willow Warbler's nest, but I carefully watched

the birds, and there was not the slightest doubt as to their species.

Now here is a case of two birds doing exactly the opposite to what we are told they do, and I expect there have been many other cases which have not been recorded; evidently in the early days of bird study, some one mentioned the habits of these birds and other naturalists have been content to follow in his steps without fully investigating the matter. No doubt such cases as these two just mentioned are rare, but that they do occur sometimes is clearly proved by my photographs.

We are often told that the Skylark never sings from a perch, but always gives out his homely song from the sky. I am, however, actually able to give a photograph of a Skylark seated on a post, and when I took the photograph on the edge of a cliff on the Scottish coast my little sitter was giving out a glorious burst of melody, and was so enraptured in his own music that I crawled up to within nine feet of him, and took several snapshots. It will be seen that his beak is open and his crest raised, and he was putting all his force into his beautiful song.

Nest of Willow Wren. Carrion Crow.

While taking a photograph of a nest on a Welsh mountain, I saw a pair of Meadow Pipits in a state of great excitement. Presently I noticed that a Cuckoo was near the nest and evidently wished to place her egg in it. One Pipit attacked the larger bird in the front, while the other repeatedly jumped on to the enemy's back and tried to peck its head. For a long time the Cuckoo took very little notice, but at last had to leave; for the two Pipits became so very determined in their attacks that it was altogether too warm to be comfortable. The Meadow Pipit is a plucky bird, and will defend its nest and young very gallantly. If some of our larger birds were only half as brave as this diminutive Pipit, then their nests would not be robbed as often as they are. I have seen a Meadow Pipit sitting on the back of a bolting rabbit which had gone too near to the nest, and while the scared animal flew fast over the rough grass, the bold little bird held on and inflicted many sharp pecks, which no doubt taught bunny a lesson.

If we go amongst birds and keep still it is surprising what a number of interesting things we shall see. Last winter I saw two Golden-

crested Wrens in an apple-tree, and I kept perfectly motionless underneath. The birds came closer and still closer to me, and then, when both were only a few inches from my face, one of them left the tree and settled upon me.

I have known many cases of the Kingfisher settling on fishermen's rods, and only a few weeks ago an intimate friend of mine wrote to say, that one of these beautiful birds alighted on his rod while he was holding it over the water, and remained there for many minutes. If the reader wishes to see a Kingfisher in its haunt, all he has to do is first to discover one of the bird's fishing stations, for they have certain places to fish from and they often return to these at regular times each day. There is then no necessity to hide, for the Kingfisher takes very little notice of human beings, and often I have been within a few yards of these birds and watched them capture their fish. There are other birds which do not seem to mind human intruders in their haunts, providing the visitor remains motionless, and if the young naturalist will only keep his eyes open and endeavour thoroughly to find out

A Young Heron at rest.

The same Bird attempting to drive the Photographer away.

the habits of birds, his country rambles will be full of interest, and no matter what the weather may be like, a day in the country will never be dull.

CHAPTER XVI

A few Hints for the Bird Photographer

AS this is a book for boys, and as so many nowadays take an interest in photography, it may not be out of place if I give a few hints as to how to photograph birds.

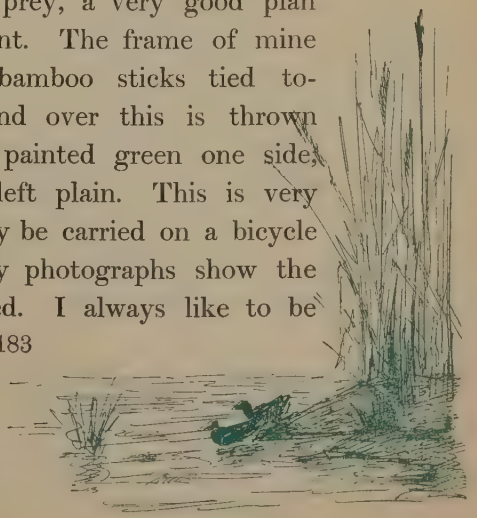
Perhaps the best way of all is to use your own common sense; if you know the habits of the bird you wish to photograph, you will succeed. I have often been amused by the remarks of lecturers on bird-life, who, by the way, commenced Nature photography many years after I had helped to give an impetus to this fascinating work. They usually commence their discourse with a long statement as to the best way to photograph a Sparrow, or give a lengthy discourse as to the most successful method of overcoming the shyness of a Lapwing. These gentlemen usually laud

Kittiwake with her two newly-hatched young.

their own methods, and run down the methods of others who have six times their experience.

In my opinion there is no 'best' method of photographing birds. It all depends on the locality and the wildness of our feathered sitter as to the way we shall try to secure a picture. Some birds are so wild that anything in the shape of a shelter near their nest will instantly cause them to desert, and in such cases it is necessary to have a string or pneumatic ball attachment to the camera, which is worked by the photographer at a distance. A more successful plan with birds like the Buzzard, Golden Eagle, and other exceedingly wild ones, is to have an electric shutter on the camera and get the birds to make the exposure themselves.

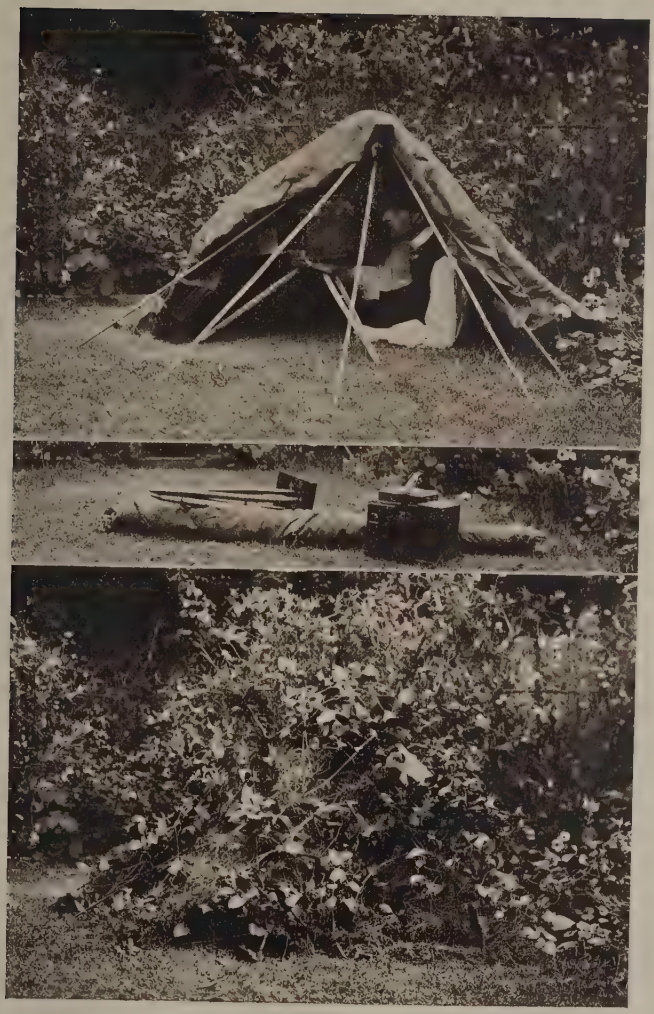
For those which are not so shy as some of these larger birds of prey, a very good plan is to make a small tent. The frame of mine is made of twelve bamboo sticks tied together at the top, and over this is thrown a piece of sack-cloth, painted green one side, while the other is left plain. This is very portable and can easily be carried on a bicycle with the camera. My photographs show the tent erected and closed. I always like to be



in hiding with my camera if possible, for many different exposures can then be made without disturbing the bird; when having a string attachment or electric release, only one picture can be secured each time the shutter is set.

As to others, such as the Plovers and those which build on the ground, an exceedingly successful way to secure their photographs is to cover oneself and camera with two sheepskins which have been fastened together, the head of one of the animals being stuffed and fixed up with a light bamboo frame. No matter what the hiding contrivance may be, if the bird sees you go underneath, it will not return for a long time, but if you go to your place of hiding with three, or even two companions, and then get underneath while they walk away, it is surprising what a difference it makes.

But to the boy with a fair amount of common sense, or uncommon sense as I have somewhere seen it called, bird photography with common species will be easy, and when he comes to photograph some of the rarer and wilder species the experience he gains with the smaller game will be very useful. Any



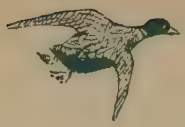
The Author in his Bird-watching Tent.

The Tent, Bird-land Camera, and Tripod packed.

The Tent in same position as top picture,
but covered with branches.

good field camera may be used for this work, but for those who can go to the extra expense, I strongly advise the 'Bird-land' camera, which was designed by the author. This is the only hand camera made suitable for all phases of bird photography, and since it was introduced four years ago, I am pleased to say that it has been taken up by nearly all the Nature photographers of repute, not only in these Islands, but in all parts of the world, and all speak very highly of its merits.

For photographing birds a quarter-plate camera is, in my opinion, the best, while for nests a half-plate or larger size gives the best results. There are many brands of plates in the market, and most are suitable for Nature photography. Many of my most successful pictures of sea-birds were taken on the well-known Ilford plates, and the various kinds under this name are really excellent for all branches of Natural History photography. Better results can be obtained with nests if isochromatic plates are used; a yellow screen must then be placed either in front or behind the lens. An exceedingly fascinating branch of Natural History work is to take photographs of nests



in colours. I have used the Sanger-Shepherd process now for four years past, and the results obtained in their natural colours are really very beautiful. By including these in my lectures, and also showing animated pictures of bird-life with my special kinematograph, I am almost able, as it were, to bring the woods and fields with me on to the platform. Colour photography is not difficult, especially the new autochrome process, which I am also using, but I advise the photographer to master ordinary photography before he takes up this branch.

Great care should be taken not to make birds desert their nests. Some bird photographers have been accused of causing many birds to forsake their eggs, and I am afraid that in some cases this has been done. If you are hiding near a nest and the bird does not return in two hours, you may take it for granted that there is something wrong and that you are not properly concealed. The task should be given up at once, or the eggs will be rendered unfertile. If you are well hidden, the majority of birds will return in less than half an hour from the time that you commenced operations. When photographing a nest in a

thick bush, do not cut away the branches in front, but bend them back and then tie them, and always try to replace them so that the nest is well hidden; for birds have many other enemies besides egg-collectors to contend with. Jackdaws, Jays, Carrion Crows, and several other species are ever on the look-out for eggs, and I have known a Sparrow Hawk swoop down and carry off a sitting Thrush that had its nest in an exposed position. Therefore it is always well not to disturb the nest or the bush it is in more than is necessary.

Many photographers are sorely puzzled as to exposure. The following hints may be of value. In calculating them I am taking it for granted that Special Rapid plates are being used, and that the light is bright without the sun shining.

Birds at rest on their nests, or in an open meadow.—Stop lens down to *f* 32; set shutter for 'time' exposure and give three seconds.

Birds walking to their nests.—Lens at *f* 8; exposure about $\frac{1}{10}$ second.

Birds feeding, such as Tits or Finches.—*f* 6·8; exposure $\frac{1}{25}$ second, or even $\frac{1}{15}$, *not* quicker than $\frac{1}{25}$.

Small birds flying.—*f* 6·8 ; $\frac{1}{500}$ second.

Large birds flying, such as Gulls.—$\frac{1}{300}$ second.

When making exposures of Sea Birds on such places as the Farne Islands or the Bass Rock, where the light is very strong, be careful not to over-expose. A third part of each of the exposures mentioned above might with advantage be given in such places, or, better still, stop the lens down to about half of the above apertures.

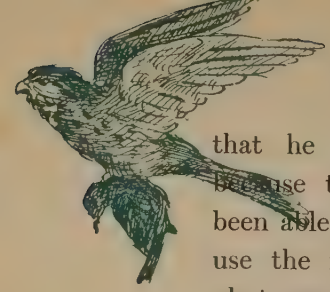
Do not try to give rapid exposures in a dense wood ; it is impossible. So many photographers spoil their photographs as pictures by getting the image of the bird too large on the plate. Remember that a small, sharp photograph enlarged makes a far better picture than a large, badly focussed one, and when the image of the bird is made to quite cover the plate it is next to impossible to have it correctly focussed. If readers had seen the originals of many of the photographs in this book they would be astonished, for several are enlarged from very small portions of a quarter-plate, and in some cases the birds, such as the Kestrel and Chough, were not more than one inch in length on the original plates.

Cormorants.

Taken with the Goerz telephoto lens. Small inset picture taken from the same distance with ordinary lens.

When stalking birds do not attempt to walk straight towards them, but work in a zigzag fashion, and it is far easier. It will no doubt come as a surprise to many naturalists to know that it is possible to get within a couple of yards of some of our wildest birds, by simply stalking them in an open meadow, in this way, that is, if the person takes the precaution of stopping every few paces. I have known a sitting Curlew to have been approached in this way, and many times I have been able to get within a yard of some very wild and shy inhabitants of Bird-land by simply walking or crawling up to them and pretending to take notice of everything except the bird.

I advise the use of a good lens, and although these are rather expensive they pay in the long run, for the pictures are far superior. I am often amused by the letters I receive from rivals who are no doubt jealous of my work, though why they should be I cannot understand, and while actually writing this, one has just arrived, saying that my photographs of birds are nothing but 'fakes.' I take this as a compliment, for it was from a publisher of a very successful book on bird-life. I imagine



that he thinks certain pictures are 'fakes' because they are better than anything he has been able to secure of those birds. Those who use the famous Goerz lenses for their Nature photography will have nothing to fear from such rivals, for it is nothing but the excellence of these lenses that makes certain photographs of mine appear 'fakes,' when of course they are not. A few years ago it was not possible to use a telephoto lens for really successful bird photography, but the splendid definition given by the new Goerz telephoto lens is so far ahead of any others that it can often be used with great success. The one or two photographs reproduced in this chapter will show the great difference in the use of the ordinary lens and the telephoto.

A very interesting branch of Nature photography is Stereoscopic work. A square bellows half-plate field camera should be used, and two lenses accurately paired must be fitted. The results are very beautiful, especially pictures of nests, and it is almost like looking at the real article. When combined with the Sanger-Shepherd colour process the finished photographs are not to be surpassed by anything.

A few Hints for the Bird Photographer

There are some birds which are extremely difficult to photograph in a wild state, such as some of the birds of prey. I have had opportunities of photographing Eagles in a wild state, but if I had attempted the task the birds would probably have deserted their eggs, and therefore I did not do it. The two illustrations of Eagles and those of the Kite in this volume were taken from captive birds, but I hope shortly to be able to show photographs of these birds in a wild state. I think my readers will agree with me, that illustrations of such magnificent specimens of birds as these Eagles and Kite are equally as useful as a picture of a wild bird, for the rocks on which the birds are sitting and the surroundings are their actual wild homes.

There is a vast difference between a photograph and a picture, but with a little care it is possible to make our photographs into pictures, and this branch of photography appeals to me. Sometimes when photographing a wild bird, it is found on developing the plate that the surroundings quite take your eye away from the bird. In cases like this I take out all the original surroundings on the negative, take another photograph in the bird's haunt, and by

combination printing endeavour to produce a more pleasing photograph. The bird itself I am careful not to alter in the slightest. To what success combination printing can be brought is seen in the wonderful landscapes taken by Mr. A. Horsley-Hinton, or the beautiful sea-scapes by Mr. F. J. Mortimer, which are usually on view at the chief photographic exhibitions. A direct snapshot is in nine cases out of ten absolutely untrue to Nature, but the combination printer endeavours to correct this falseness, and the success of certain pictures proves that it can be done. It would take up too much space here to give instructions in combination printing, but the photographer who wishes to practise it can find all information in the numerous text-books on photography.

The young naturalist should equip himself with a note-book, and jot down everything of interest, not omitting the little things which may to him seem very insignificant; for it was the inclusion of these that made many of Richard Jefferies's works so charming and true to Nature. My first book, *In Bird-land with Field-glass and Camera*, was almost entirely compiled from notes taken while I was at

A nesting colony of Guillemots.

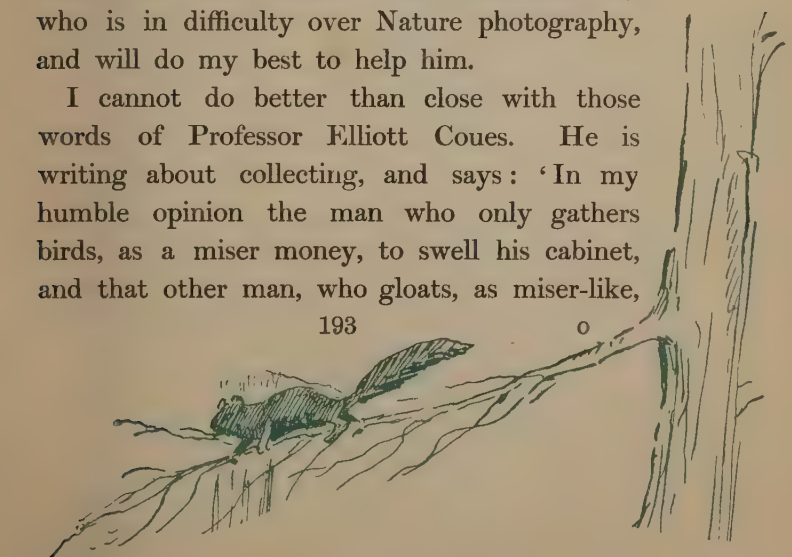
Taken with the Goerz telephoto lens. Small inset picture taken from the same distance with ordinary lens.

school, and very interesting to me are some of the pages in my early diaries.

Another important thing that the successful field-naturalist should have is a good field-glass. The one I use, and always recommend, is the Goerz Trieder Binocular, which is recognised now by all naturalists to be the very best for bird-watching. It is small, light, and extremely powerful, and it is impossible to obtain a better glass anywhere. The naturalist equipped with one of these is bound to make discoveries in Bird-land, and Nature will be to him something quite new when looked at with these binoculars, which have been truly christened the 'naturalist's field-glass.'

The foregoing remarks are just a few hints which the Nature-lover may find useful, but I shall always be pleased to hear from anybody who is in difficulty over Nature photography, and will do my best to help him.

I cannot do better than close with those words of Professor Elliott Coues. He is writing about collecting, and says: 'In my humble opinion the man who only gathers birds, as a miser money, to swell his cabinet, and that other man, who gloats, as miser-like,



over the same hoard, both work on a plane far beneath where the enlightened naturalist stands. One looks at Nature, and never knows that she is beautiful; the other knows she is beautiful; the naturalist catches her sentient expression and knows how beautiful she is. I would have you to know and love her; for fairer mistress never swayed the heart of man.'

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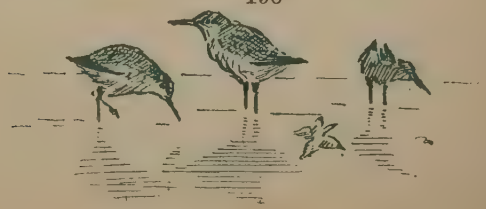

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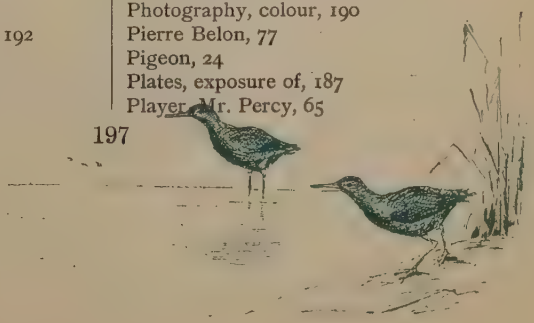

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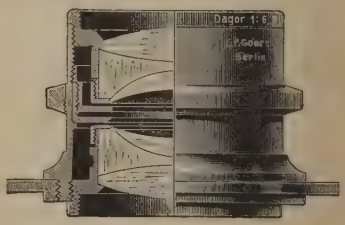

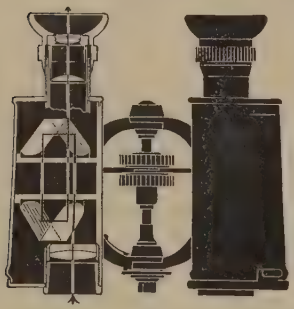

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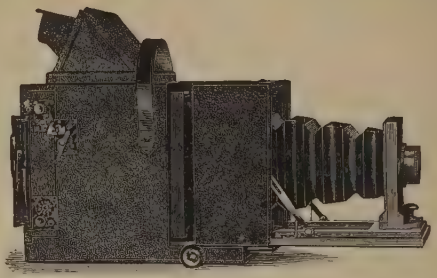

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